

THE REACTION AGAINST WILLIAM GODDIN, 1795-1801

by

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## PREFACE

A study of the reaction to William Godwin's Political Justice in England in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first few years of the nineteenth century provides insight into the change which took place in English political and moral thought during that period.

The purpose of this study is to delineate the change in attitude toward Political Justice during the 1790's. In order to present the adverse reaction in a coherent manner this study has been divided into several chapters. The first will contain a brief sketch of the contents of Political Justice and an outline of the major political and religious trends of the 1790's. In addition it will include a brief biographical sketch of Godwin and a survey of the highly favorable reaction of the English reading public immediately after publication. The last three chapters will be devoted to the adverse reaction which began in 1795, and was well in control by 1797-1798. Division, for the purpose of clarity, will be according to the literary vehicle in which the attack occurred.

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## CHAPTER I

### WILLIAM GODWIN

#### A. Early Life and Development

Born March 3, 1756, the son of a Dissenting Minister, William Godwin's<sup>1</sup> early thought was shaped to a strongly Calvinistic pattern. His early religious interests were affected by his father and his mother and even more strongly by Mrs. Southren, a relative entrusted with his earliest instruction. In addition to this strict Calvinistic training she introduced him to the study of literature. Studies were also pursued in several private schools, but by his eleventh year his parents had recognized his unusual ability and in 1767, he became the sole pupil of Samuel Newton,<sup>2</sup> a follower of Robert Sandeman,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Biographical data on Godwin was obtained from C. Kegan Paul, William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries (2 vols.; London: Henry S. King & Co., 1876); and from Ford K. Brown, The Life of William Godwin (London: J. M. Dent & Sons LTD., 1926). Used extensively for material on other persons mentioned in the paper was The Dictionary of National Biography.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel Newton was, in addition to being a teacher, minister of an Independent congregation in Norwich, and a firm and intelligent man.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Sandeman (1718-1771) was not an innovator in religion but a popularizer of the Glasite theology and polity. He was minister in Perth, Dundee and Edinburgh. He became widely known in 1757 after publication of his Letters written in criticism of James Hervey's Dialogues between Theron and Aspasio. In 1760 he went to London where he gathered a congregation and attracted wide attention with his religious teachings.

an ardent Calvinist. Under Newton's tutelage Godwin was converted to the religious position of the Sandemanian school.<sup>4</sup>

In 1773 Godwin entered the Dissenters' college at Hoxton near London. There he engaged for five years in a rigorous program of study. Of his study in the field of religion and the end result of it he said that he ". . . read all the authors of greatest repute, for and against the Trinity, original sin, and the most disputed doctrines, . . ."<sup>5</sup> but that his mind was not mature enough for impartiality, and such study always terminated in Calvinism.

Godwin was also concerned with politics, although not so much as with religion. Shortly before entering Hoxton he adopted principles of Toryism in government, and retained those beliefs during his stay there. Soon after he left school, however, he began to change his concepts on various issues, and his Toryism lasted only approximately a year.<sup>6</sup>

Upon leaving Hoxton College Godwin began his work as a Dissenting minister at Ware in Hertfordshire. There he met Reverend Joseph Fawcett,<sup>7</sup> who supported the principle of general benevolence as opposed to individual

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<sup>4</sup>Brown, 8ff. Godwin remarked of Sandeman, that he, ". . . after Calvin had damned ninety-nine in a hundred of mankind, had contrived a scheme for damning ninety-nine in a hundred of the followers of Calvin." Three of the theses which affected Godwin's later thought were disavowal of a National Church or magistrate, condemnation of the use of force to reform the church, and belief in sharing jointly any property in the church is necessary.

<sup>5</sup>Paul, I, 14-15.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., I, 16.

<sup>7</sup>Joseph Fawcett (o. 1758-1804) was a Dissenting minister and poet. In 1780 he became the minister at Walthamstow, and later revived the Sunday evening lecture at Old Jewry during winter where he enjoyed a wide audience. In 1787 he resigned Walthamstow but remained at Old Jewry until 1795 at which time he left the ministry and devoted entire time to poetry and husbandry.

affection, an idea which had lasting effect on Godwin and was to be incorporated in Political Justice. In August, 1779, Godwin left Ware and went to Stowmarket where he remained as minister until 1782. While at Stowmarket he met Frederic Norman<sup>8</sup> who introduced him to the works of the French philosophes, particularly Rousseau, d'Holbach and Helvétius. Godwin practiced the ministry for only a brief period after his removal from Stowmarket. While residing in Beaconsfield for seven months during 1783 he preached as a candidate, although he was never appointed formally. Thereafter, he ceased to consider himself as a minister.

Between the ministries at Stowmarket and Beaconsfield Godwin made his first excursion into the field of literature: it was The Life of Chatham, written in 1782 and published in 1783. After leaving Beaconsfield and until 1785 he supported himself, though very poorly, doing literary hack-work in London. In 1785 he was introduced to George Robinson,<sup>9</sup> the publisher, and was appointed writer of the historical section of the Ann. Annual Register, a yearly publication of history, politics and literature. The remaining years of the 1780's passed more easily, monetarily speaking, for Godwin and he gradually earned the reputation of a liberal political writer.

A brief survey of Godwin's political and religious beliefs shows a steady development through his early life. Because of influences felt during

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<sup>8</sup>Brown, 15. Of Frederic Norman "... nothing is known except that he was 'deeply read in the French philosophers,' and that Godwin considered him 'a man of great reflection and acuteness.'"

<sup>9</sup>George Robinson lived from 1737 to 1801. In 1763 he began business in Paternoster Row, and by 1780 was doing a large wholesale trade. In 1784 he went into partnership with his son and brother. On November 26, 1793, he was fined for selling Rights of Man. For both his hospitality, and his integrity he was noted by his contemporaries.

his youth, particularly that of Newton, Godwin accepted the religious interpretations of the Sandemanian school. When he left Hoxton his views on religion remained essentially the same; in politics he was a Tory. Exposed to the opposition of the non-college world, and under the influence of new acquaintances, his religious beliefs underwent radical change, as did his political ideas. In autobiographical notes he wrote that his religious position remained fixed for only a short time, and described the stages in the evolution of his faith which gradually led to a total disbelief of all religious creeds.

'Till 1782 I believed in the doctrine of Calvin, that is, that the majority of mankind were objects of divine condemnation, and that their punishment would be everlasting. The 'Systeme de la Nature,' read about the beginning of that year, changed my opinion and made me a Deist. I afterwards veered to Socinianism, in which I was confirmed by 'Priestley's Institutes,' in the beginning of 1783. I remember the having entertained doubts in 1785, when I corresponded with Dr Priestley. But I was not a complete unbeliever till 1787.<sup>10</sup>

Another note, written after 1787, reveals that Godwin had become a "complete unbeliever" in creeds but not in the existence of God. Total unbelief developed with his acquaintance with Thomas Holcroft during 1788 and 1789.

The decade of the 1780's was one of intellectual growth and transition for Godwin. The new ideas adopted were not all original, but were influenced by new acquaintances. Not only was he associated with Joseph Fawcett but also with the wide literary circle grouped around John Murray<sup>11</sup> and George Robinson.

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<sup>10</sup>Autobiographical note quoted in Paul, I, 26. In 1800 Godwin decided to compose his autobiography, and wrote a number of brief sketches for the years past. Many of the notes are quoted in Paul in their entirety.

<sup>11</sup>John Murray (1745-1793) was born MacMurray in Edinburgh. He served as a lieutenant of marines from 1762 until 1768, then retired and began business as a London bookseller. At that time he discontinued the use of the Mac before his name. He published many important works, wrote some and edited an annual register.



One of the most notable of his friends was Holcroft, to whom he had been introduced soon after his arrival in London and with whom he became intimate in 1788. Another was George Dyson,<sup>12</sup> a person considerably younger than Godwin but influential in his intellectual development. Godwin ranked both Holcroft and Dyson with Fawcett as his principal oral instructors of the period.

The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 inspired much intellectual activity in England. Generally it was considered a revolution patterned after the English Revolution of 1688 and inspired by English ideas.<sup>13</sup> The intellectuals thought the French Revolution an embodiment of the great principles of liberty and freedom which had been major topics of conversation for them in the past several years.<sup>14</sup> The actions of Dr. Richard Price, a Dissenting minister, show, for example, the intensity of the admiration of the French Revolution at its inception. On November 4, 1789, the anniversary of the Revolution of 1688, at the Old Jewry Meeting-house, he delivered a sermon entitled Love of Our Country, in which he contrasted true and false patriotism. True patriotism, he said, is a feeling of nearness to a certain portion of the earth's people, but not a conviction that the laws and institutions of one's country are superior to those of every other country. Price hailed the French Revolution as glorious, and closed his address by saying:

'I see the ardour of liberty catching and spreading; a general amendment beginning in human affairs; the dominion of kings

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<sup>12</sup>Brown, 40. "Of other friends little but the names remain. The third of Godwin's 'principal oral instructors' was George Dyson, who came for a while to rival Holcroft and Marshall in intimacy."

<sup>13</sup>Elie Halévy, The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism, trans. Mary Morris (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1960), 155ff.

<sup>14</sup>A number of men, of whom Wordsworth, Holcroft, Coleridge, and Godwin were but a few, can be so classed.



changed for the dominion of laws, and the dominion of priests giving way to the dominion of reason and conscience.<sup>15</sup>

His audience burst into cheers after the sermon, and met the next day to dispatch an address to the Constituent Assembly.

The physical and intellectual ferment of the French Revolution worked as a catalyst on Godwin's mind. Some of his reaction is revealed in the autobiographical note for the year 1789.

'This was the year of the French Revolution. My heart beat high with great swelling sentiments of Liberty. I had been for nine years in principle a republican. I had read with great satisfaction the writings of Rousseau, Helvétius, and others, the most popular authors of France. I observed in them a system more general and simply philosophical than in the majority of English writers on political subjects; and I could not refrain from conceiving sanguine hopes of a revolution of which such writings had been the precursors.'<sup>16</sup>

#### B. General Trends of the Period

Events of the Godwinian reaction of the late 1790's are coherent only if examined in the broader context of religious and political occurrences of the period. Conservatism in religion caused increased attacks on atheism, and a revival of a more rigid code of morality. The upsurge of interest in religion in England is often called the Evangelical revival, but was a product of the situation of all the churches. Particularly important to the Godwinian reaction were two political developments: the growth of the radical societies and the changing English attitude toward the French Revolution. The discussion which follows is an attempt to outline very generally the basic high points of the

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<sup>15</sup>Quoted in Halévy, 156 .

<sup>16</sup>Autobiographical note quoted in Paul, I, 61.

Evangelical revival, the growth of radical societies and the attitude of Englishmen toward the French Revolution; but, is not intended as an exhaustive treatment of religion and politics in the 1790's.

Three broad divisions<sup>17</sup> can be made in the English religious community of the late eighteenth century: High Church, Nonconformist and Evangelical. The Church of England was intimately identified throughout the century with the established order of things. A consideration of the make-up of the clergy serves to explicate the political support of the party in power. Church patronage was completely political, and by the 1790's both archbishops and most of the bishops were Tories. The vast majority of the benefices were controlled by the large landholders of the parishes and their choices were honored. Thus ecclesiastical as well as civil administration was in the hands of the landed gentry.

The education given prospective clergymen provides an important insight into the attitudes of the church. In both Oxford and Cambridge men destined for all professions were educated together, and no distinction in studies was made. The most important qualification for a clergyman was that he be a gentleman; thus his education was that of any other English gentleman.

The Anglican Church was opposed by several Nonconformist sects, so called because they refused to conform to the ritual and discipline of the Establishment.<sup>18</sup> Intellectually the Nonconformist ministers appeared to be superior to the Anglican clergy, and most rejected attachment to a narrow dogma. The

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<sup>17</sup>Exclusive of small groups, such as Catholics and Jews, whose influence on the general moral reaction of the time was relatively minor.

<sup>18</sup>Elie Halévy, A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, Vol. I: England in 1815, trans. by E. I. Watkins and D. A. Barker (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1961), 402.

natural outgrowth of that outlook was systems such as the Socinianism of Priestley, a complete rejection of the divinity of Jesus.<sup>19</sup> Radicals were, however, by no means in the majority in the Dissenting sects, and many believers in the old Calvinist ideas remained. Nonconformity was greatly weakened by theological disputes within the communities and also by characteristics of their organization. Each small group of the Dissent enjoyed total autonomy and, as a result, were often economically depressed.

Methodism acted as a catalyst on the religious situation, and vast changes occurred in the last few years of the century. John Wesley and George Whitefield began to preach Methodism in 1739. Both were Anglican clergymen, and concerned only with reviving the Church, not leaving it. Eventually they were driven from the Church because of the alarm they caused the conservative clergy, but Methodism remained on the periphery of the Anglican Church. With the organization of the Wesleyan sect a new principle of organization appeared in the history of English Dissent. Wesleyans were connectionalists: they renounced the autonomy of the local congregation and formed a highly centralized connection of all local congregations.<sup>20</sup> The true unit of the organization was thus the circuits formed by the union of a number of societies. Ultimate authority in the connection resided in Wesley until his death. In 1784 he formed the Conference, a body of one hundred ministers who were the legal representatives of the entire body of Wesleyans, and who after his death exercised full authority.

Methodism filled a position between that of the Establishment and the older bodies of Dissent, and Wesley's influence pervaded all the Dissenting sects.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 404.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 412.

That influence was a spirit of reaction against rationalism and republicanism which had developed during the eighteenth century and had increased with the outbreak of the French Revolution. Chapels and academies with liberal tendencies were rapidly replaced by conservative ones. Hoxton, the liberal school attended by Godwin, was among those compelled to close. The principle of complete autonomy of the congregation proved a barrier to the growth of the sects because it almost totally eliminated missionary activity. Under the influence of Methodism the spirit of autonomy began to lose much of its power. The old Nonconformist sects, between 1786 and the early 1800's, began to set up loose organizations and systems of itinerant ministers who preached to several congregations rather than a single one.

As the practice of religious autonomy began to fade, political individualism weakened also and the Dissenters tended more and more to political conservatism. Government authorities had little to fear from the Nonconformists because of the devotion to order. The years between 1792 and 1815 witnessed a continual decline of republican sentiments among the Dissenters.<sup>21</sup> During the 1790's the Tories and the Anglican clergy accused the Dissenters of disloyalty, but numerous disavowals of republicanism lent proof to the contrary. In 1792 Methodists were required, by statutes of their organization, to render loyalty and obedience to the King and the Government.<sup>22</sup> In 1798 a Baptist minister, John Martin, was expelled from the sect for giving verbal support to the French cause; and the most eloquent Baptist, Robert Hall, attacked the principles of the French Revolution in 1800.

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 425.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 427.

Methodism influenced as well the development of a new body which remained a part of the Church of England, the Low Church party or the Evangelicals. The first center of the movement was in Cambridge and led by Issac Wilner and Charles Simeon. The second large body, at Clapham, was led by William Wilberforce, the parliamentarian and philanthropist. In 1793 he began plans for his work A Practical View of Christianity,<sup>23</sup> published in 1797, which signaled the beginning of the evangelical revival. He conceived of the book as a protest against the spreading irreligion and laxity of morals of the upper and middle classes.<sup>24</sup> Socially the Evangelicals made a more vital impact than the Methodists because they reached the upper classes who had not been touched by what they considered a lower class movement.<sup>25</sup> The Evangelicals comprised only a minor part of the Church, but their influence on the morality of England was vast.<sup>26</sup> The English gentry and aristocracy of the eighteenth century had been critics of established institutions and tended toward republicanism. The French Revolution rapidly revealed to the upper classes the danger of those ideas to the social order of which they were the beneficiaries. Even men who lacked the faith necessary for justification, encouraged it among the poor as a guarantee of law and order.

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<sup>23</sup>Robert I. and Samuel Wilberforce, The Life of William Wilberforce (London: John Murray, 1838), II, 33.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., II, 61.

<sup>25</sup>G. M. Trevelyan, English Social History (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958), 495ff.

<sup>26</sup>Philip Anthony Brown, The French Revolution in English History, (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD., 1923), 179ff.

Religious conservatism was much more prevalent during the 1790's than it had been in the years before. All the different religious groups lent positive support to the established order.

The tradition of radical dissent in England did not have its beginnings in the 1790's. The program which served as the creed of three generations of radicals was formalized by the debates on the American Revolution.<sup>27</sup> In general, the radical societies were concerned primarily with political education of the mass of people. Universal manhood suffrage and an annual parliament were the two issues on which the societies revolved.

Of the several societies influential in the 1790's, the first to be founded was the Society for Constitutional Information which began in 1780. Until mid-1785 it remained the active voice of metropolitan dissent, but defeat of Pitt's second motion for parliamentary reform in 1783 and internal dissention caused it to lose much of its influence.<sup>28</sup> By 1788 a new generation of radicals had appeared, and the Society was actively revived to aid in the attempt to void the Test and Corporation Acts. The fight was carried on by the dissenters, many of whom were involved in the Society. Although one of the first of the radical societies, the Society for Constitutional Information was more moderate in the 1790's than the corresponding societies.

Sustained enthusiasm for radicalism was not found in the exclusive reform clubs because they were very little concerned about the mass of people.

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<sup>27</sup>Eugene C. Black, The Association: British Extraparliamentary Political Organization, 1769-1793 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 174.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 200.



Such enthusiasm came from the corresponding societies, composed almost entirely of the lower class working men.<sup>29</sup> One of those, the London Corresponding Society, soon took the lead and attempted to band all the societies of England into a common body. The London Corresponding Society was founded in January, 1792, by Thomas Hardy, a London shoemaker. He wrote that he had conceived of the Society as a means of "... informing people of the violence that had been committed on their most sacred rights, and of uniting them in an endeavour to recover those rights."<sup>30</sup>

The situation in England was apparently conducive to the spread of radicalism,<sup>31</sup> and by June the membership numbered in excess of 1,000. By the end of 1792, the London Corresponding Society was, Hardy believed, in correspondence with every society in Great Britain formed for the purpose of legal parliamentary reform. Membership and influence grew rapidly in the societies in 1792 and 1793, because of the popularity of Paine's Rights of Man which the societies propagated assiduously, and the general belief in England that the sacred right of representation was being ignored.<sup>32</sup>

The appeal of the London Corresponding Society and other societies to the English public alarmed several groups of people: wealthy land-owners,

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<sup>29</sup>Walter Phelps Hall, "British Radicalism, 1791-1797," Studies in History Economics and Public Law, XLIX (1912), 165.

<sup>30</sup>Thomas Hardy, Memoir of Thomas Hardy (London: James Ridgway, 1832), 10-11.

<sup>31</sup>Black, 227.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid. See also: S. Maccoby, English Radicalism 1786-1832 (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD., 1955), 55.



conservative newspaper editors and even the more moderate advocates of reform.<sup>33</sup> Beginning in 1792 the government instituted a number of repressive measures designed to end or lessen influence exerted by the reform societies. George III's Speech read to Parliament late in 1792 denounced the activities of the reformers.<sup>34</sup> In December Paine was condemned by a special jury and it became progressively more difficult to sell his works.<sup>35</sup> Newsvendors and owners as well as owners of public houses were warned against selling seditious materials and allowing republican societies to meet on their premises. The French declaration of war on England, on February 1, 1793, made the task of demanding parliamentary reform more difficult, because the societies had been quite open in support of the French cause.

A positive measure was also taken to counteract the effect of the radical societies. The Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property was founded to obtain support of the people for the established government. Support for the Association was very strong, particularly at the local level, and soon declarations of loyalty began to pour into London. Against subversion of the government the Association waged a vindictive and unceasing campaign.<sup>36</sup> Despite all the subtle and open pressures brought to bear on the reform societies by the government, they continued agitation for reform.

In 1794 either because of the government's genuine fear of the radical societies or because, as W. T. Laprade suggests, Pitt believed it would consolidate

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<sup>33</sup>Black, 225.

<sup>34</sup>Macoby, 59.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>36</sup>Black, 234ff.

support of the people and Parliament for his policies,<sup>37</sup> the government accused and tried for treason the leaders of the London Corresponding Society and the Society for Constitutional Information. Ostensibly, the trials were to prevent a convention which had been called by the societies in protest of the ~~disbanding~~ of the British Convention held in Edinburgh in November, 1793. In May, 1794, twelve leaders of the societies were arrested. In order to hold the men until their trial suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act was necessary. A series of suspensions began which lasted from May 23, 1794, to 1801.<sup>38</sup> The trials did not begin until September, 1794, but all twelve men were eventually either acquitted or released without trial.<sup>39</sup>

The London Corresponding Society gained large numbers because of the public interest in the treason trials and by mid-1795 had adopted a rather threatening a titude. So strong had public agitation become that on October 31, the two Houses presented a joint address to the King and on November 4, a Royal Proclamation was issued against seditious meetings. Two bills on Treasonable Practices and Seditious Meetings were introduced on November 6 and November 10. The severity of the bills was attacked by the hopelessly outnumbered opposition and by portions of the public affected by the bills.<sup>40</sup> Two meetings were held by the London Corresponding Society to protest the acts and to express loyalty to the King and

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<sup>37</sup>W. T. Laprade, "England and the French Revolution, 1789-1797," Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, XXVII (1909), 146ff.

<sup>38</sup>Halévy, England in 1815, 154.

<sup>39</sup>Hardy, 42ff.

<sup>40</sup>Maccoby, 94-5. Opposition mastered only a vote of 73 to 273 against sending the bills to committee.

government in November and December, but the Society soon began rapidly to lose members and power because of the dangers imposed by the two acts.

At its inception the French Revolution was viewed with favor in England.<sup>41</sup> The Revolution was at first considered one of French internal politics, but by 1791 it had become a party question in England and intensive propaganda campaigns were waged to turn English public opinion against it. After war was declared in February, 1793,<sup>42</sup> the English in general gave whole-hearted support to the war cause, largely because of the fear of invasion, but after the war dragged on for a number of years and the internal economic conditions became severe, support for Pitt began to lag. Disaffection for the war increased throughout the last years of the 1790's but every attempt at peace failed. The failures only increased English fear of invasion and that dread stimulated an active hatred of the French Republic. British war victories were greeted with ever increasing volumes of approbation, and it became apparent from 1797, that Pitt had little need to fear loss of home support. His cause was aided when France occupied the Venetian Republic, and so gave over her position as a small Republic faced by a huge monarchical coalition.<sup>43</sup>

By May, 1798, support of the English war effort was so strong that even Fox found it expedient to vow that he would be among the first to aid in repelling the attack of a foreign enemy no matter what the government of England.

The Jacobin scare was greatly intensified by the leading periodicals of the day. The Times, Anti-Jacobin Review, Annual Register and Gentleman's

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<sup>41</sup>See Laprade, 9 and Black, 209.

<sup>42</sup>Laprade suggests that Pitt deliberately provoked the French to declare war and then utilized various methods to turn public opinion against France.

<sup>43</sup>Macoby, 118-9.

Magazine were especially prominent in support of government policies, as was The Porcupine founded in 1800. Indicative of the horror with which the French Republic was regarded was John Bowles' Reflections on the Political State of Society, at the Commencement of the Year 1800. He delivered a scathing attack on all the actions of the Republic for several years past, and attempted to add to rather than lessen the fear which was rampant in England.

The whole amount of misery, carnage, and devastation, by which the last ten years have been rendered the blackest portion in the history of man, would, in comparison with what would follow the complete success of the Republic, be but a hurricane, or an earthquake, when compared with the dissolution of nature itself--with 'the wreck of matter, and the crust of worlds.' The mind recoils from the contemplation of such a scene.<sup>44</sup>

The increasing fear of radical agitation at home and the war with France abroad added to the increasing rigidity of the accepted moral code stimulated by the Evangelical revival were the primary causes for the rabid reaction against Political Justice. These events provide a framework in reference to which that reaction becomes more meaningful.

### C. Political Justice

The initial favorable reaction to the French Revolution lasted until 1791 before tapering off. During that early period the principles of the Revolution were the most important ones under discussion in literary and intellectual circles. But early reaction waned. One group became critical because of

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<sup>44</sup>John Bowles, Reflections on the Political State of Society, at the Commencement of the Year 1800 (London: G. Woodfall, 1800), 8-9.

what they considered French atrocities.<sup>45</sup> Others tenaciously maintained the primary allegiance to France despite growing evidence that she was not adhering to the early precepts.<sup>46</sup> Yet another segment of literary and intellectual opinion used ideas developed by the French philosophes and added to by early revolutionary thinkers, both French and British, as a springboard into a broader realm of thought.<sup>47</sup> Theories more radical in nature, and not dependent on the Revolution for conception or support were being developed.

A second source of stimulation for the liberals came with the publication of Edmund Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution in November, 1790, an intensely anti-French work, which spoke for the growing class of conservatives. It immediately called forth answers from such different liberals as Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft and James Mackintosh.

Political Justice was not a book dashed off in rapid answer to Burke as had been Thomas Paine's Rights of Man. Rather it was a well developed and carefully thought out book. Godwin said his book ". . . proceeded on a feeling of the imperfections and errors of Montesquieu, and a desire of supplying a less faulty work. . . . It was my first determination to tell all that I apprehended to be truth, and all that seemed to be truth, confident that from such a proceeding the best results were to be expected."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>This group was composed of those who readily followed Burke in 1790, and consisted largely, though not entirely, of the wealthy land-holders.

<sup>46</sup>A number of young liberals such as Wordsworth and Thelwall made up this group.

<sup>47</sup>The third group was that gathered around Godwin and Holcroft, as well as a number of independent radicals.

<sup>48</sup>Autobiographical note quoted in Paul, I, 67.

Godwin's literary crisis occurred in 1791. On June 30, while dining with Robinson, Godwin proposed the composition of a treatise based on his political principles. The proposition was accepted by Robinson on July 10, and Godwin terminated his association with the New Annual Register, an act which made him wholly dependent for pecuniary support on his now work. Composition of Political Justice continued steadily through the remainder of 1791 and 1792. Although Godwin worked consistently, he worked slowly, composing only a small amount each day, and he continued to engage in other activities, many of a political nature. Friends of his were active members in the two major political and debating societies in London, the London Corresponding Society and the Constitutional Society, and Godwin participated in many of their activities though he did not join.<sup>49</sup>

The nature of the work in progress gradually became known and Godwin was treated as a brilliant author even before his work appeared. As a consequence of his growing reputation he was introduced to a number of the leading political and literary figures of the day, notable among whom were James Mackintosh and Horne Tooke. With his acquaintances Godwin frequently met to discuss the principles of his work.

Publication of Political Justice early in 1793 was an important mark in the history of English thought. With verve and assurance Godwin stated the principles, carried to their logical and ultimate conclusions, that had been informally discussed since the outbreak of the French Revolution. Godwin's was

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<sup>49</sup>Godwin believed that each man should be a totally independent being intellectually and was, therefore, against all associations. The belief was incorporated in Political Justice.



a democratic theory based on a rigid application of the principle of utility, rather than on the natural rights theory.<sup>50</sup>

The full title of the first edition of the work, An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness, is illustrative of Godwin's concept of his book based on his political principles.

Godwin believed that "all men will grant that the happiness of the human species is the most desirable object for human science to promote, and that intellectual and moral happiness or pleasure is extremely to be preferred to those which are precarious and transitory."<sup>51</sup> Granted the idea of utility, or the importance of the happiness of man, Godwin began his search for a principle upon which to base institutions to promote that happiness. In the preface he stated that he conceived

. . . politics to be the proper vehicle of a liberal morality. That description of ethics will be found perhaps to be worthy of slight estimation, which confines itself to petty detail and the offices of private life, instead of designing the combined and simultaneous improvement of communities and nations. But, if individual correction ought not to be the grand purpose of ethics, neither ought it by any means to be overlooked. It appeared sufficiently practicable to make of such a treatise, exclusively of its direct political use, an advantageous vehicle for this subordinate purpose.<sup>52</sup>

He further defined his subject by saying that it was a ". . . department of the science of morals. Morality is the source from which its fundamental axioms

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<sup>50</sup>Halévy, Growth of Philosophic Radicalism, 155.

<sup>51</sup>William Godwin, An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness, ed. F. E. L. Priestley (photographic facsimile of third edition corrected; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), III, 237.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., I, vi-vii.



must be drawn, and they will be made somewhat clearer in the present instance, if we assume the term justice as a general appellation for all moral duty."<sup>53</sup>

In his search for a principle Godwin examined the history of mankind, which he felt was little more than a compilation of crimes. War in the international realm and utter poverty for many in the domestic situation combine to oppress man and frequently cause him to react violently; and the violence is in turn put down by force and yet more misery results. Despite the rather vicious tendencies of the governments in existence Godwin felt that they could be much improved and made to conform to their true purpose, the protection of the citizens from violence and oppression. His concept of the probability of improvement he based on a belief in the perfectibility of man, a reference to man's progress toward perfection throughout history.

Godwin believed that man enters the world with no innate principles and is, therefore, neither virtuous nor vicious when he comes into existence. Because of that, man is the product of his environment and his morality and character essentially determined by education. The term education he used in the most comprehensive sense that it can possibly have, ". . . including every incident that produces an idea in the mind, and can give birth to a train of reflections."<sup>54</sup> The most powerful agents in the education of man are the political institutions because of their wide-spread and almost unlimited influences. Since truth remains consistent and has only to be stated to be recognized and accepted, it is the fault of the political institutions that vice survives in

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., I, 123.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., I, 45.

the world. Vice is no more than man's intellectual errors and mistakes adopted as continuous principles of conduct.

The general maxim for the guidance of man at which Godwin arrived in his enquiry was that of universal benevolence. His conception of justice or moral duty was one of utility which demands that each person contribute his entire effort to the service and benefit of the whole. From these two theses, man's perfectibility and universal benevolence, Godwin proceeded to develop the remainder of his theory.

In order to understand the various points of reaction against Political Justice, it is necessary to discuss in some detail the component parts. The book was a product of the French Revolution, and many of its basic tenets were taken from pre-revolutionary as well as revolutionary thinkers. In his theory, however, Godwin did not stop with the Revolution but carried it to its ultimate logical conclusion: the formulation of a perfect society. Not only did he go beyond the Revolution, but he also refused to endorse all the activities of the revolutionaries. The following precepts of Political Justice are important either as focal points of later discussion or because they reveal the multiple character of Godwin's intellectual sources.

The moral theory of Political Justice is based on the acceptance of man's moral perfectibility and the application of universal benevolence. Man's capacity for moral perfectibility is proven as is his intellectual perfectibility by reference to the progress of society since its inception and the lack of inherent tendencies of evil in man. Godwin carefully stated that man was not perfect, and would never be because that would remove the possibility of further improvement. Therefore, man possesses unlimited capacity for moral improvement.

Perfect justice demands that every man do every thing in his power for the promotion of the general welfare. Although the rule of loving ones neighbor as oneself possessed merit as a principle for the guidance of the mass of man, Godwin did not consider it strictly accurate for probably one man would be ". . . a being of more worth and importance than the other."<sup>55</sup> It is, therefore, the duty of each man to carefully observe his neighbor and act toward him as he deserves. A system in which each treats others as he wishes to be treated does not contribute to the general good because it does not condition man to being treated as he deserves as a moral being. The much-attacked example Godwin used to illustrate the principle of perfect justice was the justice of saving Fénélon rather than a chamberlain or a valet in case of a fire which must destroy one of the lives. Because the life of Fénélon, the author of Télémaque, is of much vaster importance to the world than that of a chambermaid no man should hesitate, nor should the maid, to save his life. Since true justice eliminates preference based on personal relationships, the truth of the Fénélon example would remain even if the maid were related to the person making the decision. This example was later frequently cited as an example of the inhumanity of Godwin's system of universal benevolence.<sup>56</sup>

In denying the importance of individual affection Godwin included marriage. Marriage is, he said, the worst form of cohabitation and limits the free progress of man's mind. Rather than argue about the unhappiness of two people forced to live together because of a thoughtless action of youth, Godwin

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., I, 126.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., I, 127.

opposed marriage because it tempted those people to become dupes of falsehood by fooling themselves into thinking they were happy together. This was, of course, contrary to the principles of truth and sincerity. In addition to the preceding arguments against marriage, Godwin protested the unfairness of one man monopolizing the time and affections of one woman and thus jealously excluding her from the pleasure of other society.<sup>57</sup> This, too, proved a focal point of later attack. Writers protested against the label of monopoly on marriage, and insisted that only by preserving marriage could society retain any stability.

Involved in Godwin's moral theory were some rather radical elements which caused a furor during the reaction. Gratitude should not be considered a part of the fabric of justice or of virtue because it leads to preference of one individual over another on the basis of a consideration other than his superior worth.<sup>58</sup> Godwin did not accept the binding nature of promises: if an act which has been promised is later discovered to be opposed to justice it is man's duty to refuse to perform the act promised.<sup>59</sup>

Godwin considered politics an intrinsic part of morality because of the power of political institutions to affect man's happiness. His affirmation of that interrelationship resembled that of Rousseau, Helvétius, d'Holbach and Mably. Rather than insisting on an inherent power for good in government, as they did, however, Godwin emphasized the positive tendency for evil existent in a government.

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., II, 506ff.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., I, 128ff.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., I, 194ff.

Government, which is an institution and must be differentiated from society, grew out of the need for protection and is of use only in preserving a situation in which man can freely exercise his understanding and moral duty. At best government is no more than a necessary evil.<sup>60</sup> The distinction between society as good and government as evil is very important in Godwin's theory, because what he views as the perfect state would be a continuation of society without institutional government. Realizing, however, that a government, though evil, was necessary in the present condition of society, Godwin examined the various justifications that man had offered for their existence: superior strength, divine right and social contract. Each one he rejected because it removed the ability of the individual to function through his private judgment. His denial of a permanent basis for government is essential to his interpretation that government is merely a device of society to prevent the vice of a few marrying the happiness of the whole, and can and should disappear as man's mind is improved. The natural rights theory so prevalent at the time, and linked closely with the idea of natural law, Godwin rejected. His rejection gave no more power to the state because Godwin insisted that as the individual has no natural rights the state also has none.

Godwin then turned his attention to an examination of the forms of government: elective and hereditary monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. The first two he rejected as founded on inequality and falsehood. His argument closely resembles parts of Fénelon's Télémaque and much of Helvétius' De l'Esprit, but has its own peculiar emphasis. Godwin's anti-aristocratic ideas probably came

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., II, 2, 215.

from Burke's Vindication of Natural Society but, again, were changed to become his own. Democracy alone remained an acceptable form of temporary government because it allowed man to make decisions based on individual thought.<sup>61</sup> He did not accept all existing forms of democracy as the best possible, however, but insisted on constant improvement, simplicity and regard for the private judgment of the individual. He denied the efficacy of the system of representation because it infringes on private judgment, but grants that it offers fewer disadvantages than any other form.

Godwin did not believe that British political institutions were consistent with the precepts of reason and justice, and therefore, felt that another system should be sought.<sup>62</sup> He recommended the use of twelve-man juries to exercise political authority over small areas comparable to parishes. The juries would be reduced as soon as possible to one man, and eventually it was to be hoped that, as man was educated to perceive truth, even the one man would be unnecessary and reason would rule alone.<sup>63</sup> Godwin's political anarchism was peculiarly his own.

Godwin did not, however, believe that to immediately remove all governmental institutions would make man happier or better able to exercise individual principles. He insisted at all points on the doctrine of gradualism, and it was in ignoring that part of his system that later writers distorted it. Man must be educated to a level at which he would be able to exist without institutions

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., II, 118ff.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., II, 209.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., II, 211-2.



designed to hold its pernicious tendencies in check. To eliminate all governments would do no more than turn men with vicious tendencies loose on other men, and thereby necessitate new organizations to maintain order. Man should instead seek a form of government which would provide the least amount of control necessary to maintain order.

Godwin believed that an essential part of his theory, and one that completed it was a discussion of property. Many of the crimes of the world stem from the inequitable distribution of property. The basis for determining true ownership must be justice, and justice decrees that the person most in need is the true owner of an object. A just system of property then would be one in which no man was owner of vast amounts but in which each person received enough for his well-being. Obvious benefits of happiness, elimination of poverty and intellectual advancement would arise from such an equitable system.<sup>64</sup>

Having sketched a system for the moral advancement and the physical well-being of man, Godwin saw but one task left to make his work complete: to endow man with immortality. He stated that the gradual increase of the power of mind over matter could eventually eliminate, perhaps, sickness and death. Godwin's ideas concerning immortality, he warned the reader, came as a result of an excursion into the realm of speculation and should be accepted as such, and if proved false would in no way invalidate the remainder of the work which was based on logic and reason. Godwin's speculations on immortality were attacked and ridiculed during the reaction, with most of his attackers ignoring his warning that they were speculations.

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., II, 420ff.



### C. Initial Public Acceptance

Immediate reaction to Political Justice was highly favorable, with only a modicum of disapprobation from the conservatives, who were alarmed by the boldness of his deduction which threatened orthodoxy in religion and government. "Mr. Godwin" in Public Characters of 1799-1800, partially reveals how closely Godwin was described as having approached the position of prophet rather than philosopher.

Within a few weeks of the appearance of that work, his immediate object, the acquisition of fame and its consequent power in the application of his talents, was obtained. He was not merely made known to the public, but was ranked at once among men of the highest genius and attainments.

.....  
Perhaps no work of equal bulk ever had such a number of readers; and certainly no book of such profound inquiry ever made so many proselytes in an equal space of time.<sup>65</sup>

William Hazlitt, avowed admirer of Godwin, described the intensity of the immediate effect in England:

No work in our time gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country as the celebrated Enquiry concerning Political Justice. Tom Paine was considered for the time as a Tom Fool to him, Paley as an old woman, Edmund Burke a flashy sophist. Truth, moral truth, it was supposed, had here taken up its abode; and these were the oracles of thought.<sup>66</sup>

Concrete proof of Godwin's popularity appeared in the number of printings and editions immediately called for: in England three editions were published in

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<sup>65</sup>Anon., "Mr. Godwin," Public Characters of 1799-1800 (London: H. L. Galabin, 1799), II, 372-4.

<sup>66</sup>William Hazlitt, The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, Vol. XI: The Spirit of the Age & Conversations of James Northcote, ed. P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, LTD., 1932), 17.

five years, two were pirated and reprinted in Dublin and one in Philadelphia.<sup>67</sup> Although Pitt thought he had little to fear from the principles of Political Justice because of the high price of the book, the number of sales soon proved him wrong. Not only did educated and wealthy people read the book, but laborers pooled money and bought group copies. Associations were formed in many parts of England to read the book and discuss it together, and within a very short time its principles were, according to Godwin, widely known and accepted.<sup>68</sup>

Typical of the attitude of the sober-minded liberals is a review in the New Annual Register, a relatively conservative, certainly not Jacobin journal.

'We have been the more full in our account of the subjects which are disowned in this work as it has greatly excited the public attention, and is likely to give rise to numerous interesting disquisitions in morals, jurisprudence, and politics. The author possesses a well-informed, bold, and vigorous mind, and has delivered, without concealment, the result of his reflections, after a liberal and unrestricted enquiry. . . . we do not, however, subscribe, without exception, to Mr Godwin's opinions. Many of them differ widely from the principles which we have imbibed, which we consider to be of importance, and which we have not been led to change by his very acute and plausible reasonings. Some of his positions and projects we consider to be fanciful and extravagant.'<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>1793—An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness—pirated in Dublin; 1796—Enquiry concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness—pirated in Dublin and Philadelphia; 1798—title same as of second edition.

<sup>68</sup>Paul, I, 118.

<sup>69</sup>quoted in Brown, 61.

It is possible to discern a number of kinds of supporters of Godwin. The first group was composed of close personal friends, such as J. P. Curran,<sup>70</sup> James Marshal,<sup>71</sup> Thomas Wedgwood<sup>72</sup> and Thomas Holcroft, who, in general, maintained favorable attitudes even after the beginning of the adverse reaction. A second group of supporters were stable professional men who were impressed with what they considered a new statement of liberalism. Some of these men accepted the book only with reservations, but others were willing to ignore portions of it which conflicted with their beliefs. During the period of reaction most of the men here represented turned against Godwin and were among the most prolific of his attackers. A third category of adherents was the young intellectuals of the day. Some of these men remained faithful supporters of Godwin during the reaction and some did not.

Foremost among Godwin's personal friends was Holcroft whose allegiance to Political Justice never diminished even during a personal quarrel. His influence on Godwin was striking, and their ideas on politics were similar. In a

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<sup>70</sup>John Philpot Curran (1750-1817) was an Irish judge and parliamentarian, noted for oratorical powers. He was called to the Irish bar in 1775, and in 1782 became a king's counsel. In 1783 he was elected to the Irish House of Commons. During the 1790's he was active in the defense of a number of Irish insurrectionists, and was even accused, though nothing was proved against him, in the 1798 uprisings.

<sup>71</sup>Brown, 26. "Marshal like the philosopher, was translating, indexing and correcting for the publishers, but unlike him 'lacked that originality of talent,' Godwin wrote thirty years later, 'that the world has been good-natured enough to impute to me,' and remained all his life at the same work."

<sup>72</sup>Thomas Wedgwood, the son of Josiah Wedgwood, is remembered as the first photographer and as a benefactor to men of letters. As a result of his ill health he was educated largely at home, but spent some time at Edinburgh University. He lived only from 1771 until 1805, but in that time made his mark on the society in which he lived.

letter to Godwin in July of 1795, Holcroft mentioned that while on a trip he had encountered many warm admirers of Political Justice and had ". . . had occasion to talk of you, or rather of your essence, your 'Political Justice,' and your 'Caleb.' If you suppose I understand you, I need not tell you in what terms I spoke."<sup>73</sup>

Godwin frequently recorded conversations or notes on conversations held with friends. His entry on March 23, 1793, shows the early reaction of acquaintances.

Dr. Priestley says my book contains a vast extent of ability- . . . he admires all my principles, but cannot follow them into all my conclusions with me respecting self-love--he thinks mind will never so far get the better of matter as I suppose; he is of opinion that the book contains a great quantity of original thinking, and will be uncommonly useful. Horne Tooke tells me that my book is a bad book, and will do a great deal of harm--Holcroft and Jardine had previously informed me, the first, that he said the book was written with very good intentions, but to be sure nothing could be so foolish; the second, that Holcroft and I had our heads full of plays and novels, then thought ourselves philosophers.<sup>74</sup>

The opinions of Dr. Priestley and Horne Tooke are indicative of the attitudes of some of Godwin's contemporaries. Their rational manner of accepting only a portion of Political Justice did not diminish mutual respect and friendship. Even Horne Tooke's acceptance of nothing but the good intention of the book, Godwin was able to record with equanimity.

A brief correspondence between Samuel Newton, Godwin's former teacher, and Godwin in December of 1793, indicates the same trend: acceptance without the

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<sup>73</sup>Paul, I, 150-1.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., I, 116.

total approbation relatively common at the time and criticism without the utter condemnation of the later years. Newton's personal disagreement with Godwin was a result of the latter's atheism, but his violent reaction of throwing the book aside before completion was not because of atheistic tendencies, but because he feared that the one part would "... damn the book, which contained in it so many useful and interesting sentiments."<sup>75</sup>

Thomas Wedgwood, another friend of Godwin's, considered Godwin almost the "... only person whose judgment is valuable to me on speculative principles."<sup>76</sup> Wedgwood's support of Godwin continued until his death in 1805.

The best example of the quality of allegiance given by the second group of people who early endorsed the principles of Political Justice was Dr. Samuel Parr.<sup>77</sup> Godwin's acquaintanceship with Parr followed their introduction by James Mackintosh in 1794. In October Godwin went to Warwickshire to visit the Parr home. He was treated with respect and intimacy. During that trip Godwin also observed the extent to which his principles had spread to areas outside London. Few people in Warwickshire had not heard of the book and most were to some degree familiar with its teachings which, Godwin believed, "... coincided in a great degree with the sentiments then prevailing in English society."<sup>78</sup> The visit lasted only a few days but the two met several other times,

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., I, 85.

<sup>76</sup>Brown, 78.

<sup>77</sup>Samuel Parr (1747-1825) was educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. In 1771 he established a school at Stanmore to rival Harrow, but it was unsuccessful. In 1776 he became master of Colchester grammar school; and, in 1783 was given the perpetual curacy of Hatton in Warwickshire. In 1785 he established his residence there and remained throughout his life. His most remembered publication was his Spital Sermon preached in refutation of Godwin.

<sup>78</sup>Paul, I, 118.

and as late as 1797 were on terms of familiarity. In June, 1797, while on a tour with Basil Montagu,<sup>79</sup> Godwin again visited Dr. Parr, and described the tone of that meeting in a letter to his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin:

We had a good deal of raillery. I told him that he understood everything except my system of 'Political Justice;' and he replied that was exactly the case with me. Montagu afterwards told me that Dr Parr had formerly assured him that I was more skillful in moral science than any man now living. I am not, however, absolutely sure of the accuracy of Montagu's comprehension.<sup>80</sup>

Godwin cut short his stay with Parr in 1794 and hurried back to London to be near Holcroft and to lend assistance during the political trials of the leaders of the London Corresponding Society. Godwin composed an article which appeared in the Morning Chronicle and was thought to be influential in the proceedings by helping to shape public opinion.

Francis Place, a tailor and a member of the London Corresponding Society, was another of Godwin's adherents. He had read Godwin in 1793, become a disbeliever in abstract rights and retained his initial belief in the principles of political justice. In his unpublished autobiography for the year 1795 he wrote of his wish to enter business and the fear of personal ruin that caused him to hesitate.

Mr. Godwin's book extinguished this fear in me. It led me to reason on the matter, and convinced me that a man might turn

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<sup>79</sup>Basil Montagu (1770-1851) was educated at Charterhouse and Christ's College, Cambridge. In his youth he was an intimate of Coleridge and Wordsworth and shared their early enthusiasm for French ideas. Later he was much influenced by Mackintosh and lost his early zeal for those ideas as well as his intense admiration for Godwin.

<sup>80</sup>Paul, I, 253.



others to account in every kind of undertaking without dishonesty, that the ordinary tricks of tradesmen were not necessary, and need not be practised. This was to me the most grateful kind of knowledge I could acquire, and I resolved to lose no time in putting in practise.<sup>81</sup>

A number of years later, in 1810, Place and Godwin met and because of Godwin's lack of financial skill Place lost respect for him as a man.<sup>82</sup> Despite personal animosity and general public hostility to Godwin, Place always remained an adherent of the doctrines of Political Justice.

The last group of men who readily adopted Political Justice went much beyond the others in intensity, and became fervent disciples of, rather than simply admirers of Godwin. The young intellectuals, principally Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey, William Wordsworth, John Thelwall and Henry Crabb Robinson, imbued with the principles of liberty being discussed in the early 1790's and lacking an ideological focal point, adopted Godwin's Political Justice.

Perhaps the first of this group to adopt the Godwinian precepts was Southey who twice in 1793 borrowed Political Justice from the Bristol library, and who "... read, and all but worshipped"<sup>83</sup> its precepts. Southey's adherence was superficial and it is unlikely that he understood the doctrines that he accepted so readily, but his influence on Coleridge was strong. Both Coleridge and Southey wrote poetry in praise of Godwin or the principles of Political Justice. Although both claimed to have originated the idea, together they

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<sup>81</sup>Graham Wallas, The Life of Francis Place (New York: Burt Franklin, 1951), 29.

<sup>82</sup>In 1810 Godwin asked Place to assist him in getting his financial matters in order. In his attempt to aid Godwin, Place lost approximately 400 pounds.

<sup>83</sup>Brown, 62.



formed the scheme for Pantisocracy, a utopian society to be founded eventually on the banks of the Susquehanna. The Pantisocratic society was, according to Coleridge, to have "... comprised all that is good in Godwin. . . ."84 The plan for going to America failed and with that failure both lost much of their early radicalism. Despite his early avidity Southey's republicanism was short-lived and his Wat Tyler of 1794 was probably the last manifestation of his Godwinism.

The extent to which Coleridge accepted Political Justice is debatable, because his letters are frequently contradictory and the ones to Godwin are of questionable sincerity. In October 1794 he wrote Southey that he did not think as highly of Godwin as Southey apparently did, but in the same letter said the principles of Political Justice would be used in his book of Pantisocracy. In a letter to Southey in December Coleridge enclosed his laudatory sonnet to Godwin which was published in the Morning Chronicle in the following January. Coleridge had not, by his own account, read Political Justice when he wrote the sonnet. In late 1795 he met Godwin and his contemporary letters reveal an unfavorable impression, though a letter of 1813 records that his emotions at the time were greatly affected by the prospect of meeting "... Mr Godwin, the sublime Philosopher, the awful Legislator and grand Justiciary for all rational Natures, . . . ."85

Coleridge's approbation was rather spasmodic and true appreciation, though he early gave oral acceptance, came only after he and Godwin became

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<sup>84</sup>Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Collected Letters, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956), I, 115.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., IV, 830.

intimate friends. His early reaction, despite its flexibility, however, places him in the category of young intellectuals who briefly followed Godwin.

William Wordsworth's conversion to Godwinism followed a different pattern. When he returned to England from France in December 1792, he was an avid supporter of the ideals of the Revolution. Apparently familiar with Political Justice almost from the date of its appearance,<sup>86</sup> Wordsworth immediately accepted the parts of it that were compatible with the revolutionary ideals. In particular he adopted Godwin's doctrine of moral necessity as opposed to the one most generally accepted of free will. Indications of familiarity with Godwin's ideas can be found in the "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff," probably written in 1793.<sup>87</sup> This apology for the French Revolution employed Godwin's arguments which stated that government is an evil, but necessary because of the evil tendencies of man which result from his education.<sup>88</sup> Wordsworth was not, however, in need of a master, and his acceptance of Godwin was tempered. Even declaration of war between France and England did little more than jolt Wordsworth, and it was not until the Reign of Terror, September, 1793, to July, 1794, that his faith was badly shaken. The overthrow of Robespierre renewed his hope but only briefly and he totally turned from the Revolution when the French people "... losing sight of all which they had struggled for. . ." <sup>89</sup> became the oppressors.

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<sup>86</sup>Emile Legouis, The Early Life of William Wordsworth, 1770-1798, trans. by J. W. Matthews (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1932), 264.

<sup>87</sup>William Wordsworth, The Prose Works, ed. Alexander B Grosart (London: Edward Moxon, Son, and Co., 1876), I, 1ff. The letter was not published until 1876, and was undated.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 4ff.

<sup>89</sup>William Wordsworth, The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (2nd ed.; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959), 412.

Wordsworth turned from the revolution to Godwin and became one of his most fervent disciples. While in London during this time he ". . . breathed a Godwinian atmosphere. . ."<sup>90</sup> associating with Godwinians Johnson, the publisher, and Fawcett. Although his letters do not speak of Godwin specifically, they do indicate a close adherence to his principles.<sup>91</sup> His allegiance to Godwin was short, however, and soon after his removal from London to Racedown in September, 1795, he began his anti-Godwinian drama, The Borderers. By March, 1796, he had ceased to speak highly of Godwin in his letters.

Henry Crabb Robinson, much unlike the individuals just discussed, retained his admiration for Godwin throughout his life. He was not unique in that respect but certainly unusual. Two reasons can be cited for his continuing allegiance: first, he probably understood the book so his acceptance was not superficial, and second, he was not bothered by the general furor which occurred soon after his discovery of the book because he ". . . perceived then the difference between principles as universal laws, and maxims of conduct as prudential rules."<sup>92</sup> In the spring of 1795, Robinson first read Political Justice

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<sup>90</sup>Lagouis, 264.

<sup>91</sup>William Wordsworth, The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1935), I, 120ff. "There is a further duty incumbent upon every enlightened friend of mankind. He should let slip no opportunity of explaining and enforcing those general principles of the social order, which are applicable to all times and to all places; he should diffuse by every method a knowledge of those rules of political justice, from which the further any government deviates the more effectually must it defeat the object for which government was ordained."

<sup>92</sup>Henry Crabb Robinson, Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson, ed. Thomas Sadler (Boston: Fields, Osgood, and Co., 1870), I, 20.

and it gave a turn to his mind, and in effect directed his entire life. Robinson aptly caught the enthusiasm of his youth in his diary, and could have been speaking for almost his entire generation when he said:

I entered fully into its spirit, it left all others behind in my admiration, and I was willing even to become a martyr for it; for it soon became a reproach to be a follower of Godwin, on account of his supposed atheism. . . . And I thought myself qualified to be his defender, for which purpose I wrote a paper which was printed in Flower's Cambridge Intelligencer.<sup>93</sup>

In 1798 Robinson attended a meeting of the Royston Book Club, and participated in a discussion of Godwin's philosophy of universal benevolence. Because of his knowledge and acceptance of Political Justice Robinson was able to acquit himself quite well in a debate with the leading members of the club.<sup>94</sup>

John Thelwall, one of the members of the London Corresponding Society arraigned with Holcroft and Horne Tooke in the political trials of 1794, was another of the radical Godwinians. He adopted Godwin's ideas with only minor changes, the most important of which was advocacy of violence as a political expediency. More concerned with present conditions than with those of the future, he felt force should be used if necessary to change governments. Despite Godwin's attack on him in 1795 at the time of Pitt's Sedition Bill, Thelwall remained loyal to Godwinism and continued to use his major ideas throughout his career.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 23. "Among the speakers were Benjamin Flower, Mr. Rutt, and four or five of the best reputation in the place; . . ." Benjamin Flower, Robinson identified as ". . . the ultra-liberal proprietor and editor of the Cambridge Intelligencer, . . ."

<sup>95</sup>B. Sprague Allen, "William Godwin's Influence upon John Thelwall," Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, XXXVII (December, 1922), 662ff.

In a pamphlet published in 1801, Godwin, concerning the reaction said:

This book made its appearance in February 1793; its reception with the public was favourable much beyond my conception of its merits; it was the specific and avowed occasion of procuring me the favour and countenance of many persons of the highest note in society and literature, of some of those who have since lent themselves to increase the clamour, which personal views and the contagion of fashion have created against me. For more than four years it remained before the public, without any man's having made the slightest attempt for its refutation; it was repeatedly said that it was invulnerable and unanswerable in its fundamental topics; high encomiums were passed on the supposed talents of the writer. . . . 96

Although there is an undoubted element of exaggeration in Godwin's statement, it contains an element of the truth. While the period of admiration did not last four years, it was very intense during this short period.

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<sup>96</sup>William Godwin, Thoughts occasioned by the Perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon (London: Taylor and Wilds, 1801), 1.

## CHAPTER II

### ONSET OF ANTI-JACOBINISM

When Godwin wrote that the general approbation he had received lasted for four years he either exaggerated or was unaware of the growing currents of reaction present from 1795. The conservative political thought and the evangelical revival became important channels for thought. There was growing alarm in England throughout the 1790's. Many were slow, however, to associate that alarm with the principles of Godwin's book, and it was several years after publication of Political Justice before the reaction was general.

The conservative followers of Burke had been against Godwin from the time his principles became known, but the intellectual revolt did not begin until 1795. Initially, the attack on Godwin came from Wordsworth and Coleridge. Wordsworth had become, in reaction against the French Revolution, a devout Godwinian very early in 1795.<sup>1</sup> The central doctrine of Political Justice for him was that concerning necessity as opposed to free will in the intellectual life. The evolution of his attitude can not be traced in his letters because for the vital period of 1795 only a few exist. From a letter of June 1794 in which he advocated the promulgation of the ". . . rules of political justice,"<sup>2</sup> to one of March 1796 in which he voiced a low opinion of Godwin personally, Wordsworth had changed his mind.

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<sup>1</sup>Ernest de Selincourt, "Wordsworth's Preface to 'The Borderers,'" *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1934), 176.

<sup>2</sup>Wordsworth, Early Letters, I, 120.



Wordsworth's rejection of Godwin was based on the realization that anything, even the abuses of the Reign of Terror, could be excused by a reference to his discussion of necessity.<sup>3</sup> The Borderers, an attempt to expose the fallacy of Godwinism, was written late in 1795 and marks his rejection of Political Justice. The Essay, written soon after to introduce and explain the moral significance of The Borderers, shows a renewal of interest in defining what was for him moral reality.

Oswald, the central figure of The Borderers, was devoted to the pursuit of good as a youth but was trapped into causing the death of an elderly man innocent of the crimes imputed to him. In order to justify his own actions he attempted to force others into crime. His moral doctrines were those of Godwin, but he used them to justify his evil passions rather than to promote the general good. This, then, is the center of the argument for Wordsworth: man is not a mere machine and his passions must be taken into consideration as they will always influence his reason to a greater or lesser extent. Passion is not of one kind but varies widely, and hatred is innate in man as is love. Therefore, for Wordsworth, it was quite feasible that Godwinism could be used for purposes of pure evil as well as pure good.

Wordsworth in his analysis of Oswald in the Essay said:

His imagination is powerful, being strengthened by the habit of picturing possible forms of society where his crimes would be no longer crimes, and he would enjoy that estimation to which, from his intellectual attainments, he deems himself entitled.

.....  
He disguises from himself his own malignity by assuming the

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<sup>3</sup>De Selincourt, 170-1. See also: Legouis, 270.

character of a speculator in morals, and one who has the hardihood to realize his speculations.<sup>4</sup>

Wordsworth abandoned political speculation for a time because he realized that neither the political institutions envisaged by Godwin nor those of the English government were appropriate to society as he wished it to be. Ultimately he defined his political beliefs in the Tract on the Convention of Cintra, saying that man is under moral obligation to serve his country. The nation, as he conceived it, is made of common men but is an exalted entity and better than the component parts. Thus, unlike the service of reason demanded by Godwin, service of the nation causes no break in the natural affections.<sup>5</sup>

Coleridge's animosity toward Godwin was revealed in his letters and in The Watchman. It is extremely difficult to define a break or change in Coleridge's attitude toward Godwin. His first acceptance, by his own account, was less admiration for Godwin than for Southey who recommended Political Justice to him. In 1814, in a letter to Godwin, Coleridge described the changes in his opinion of Political Justice.

When I had read them, religious bigotry, the but half-understanding your principles, and the not half-understanding my own, combined to render me a warm & boisterous Anti-Godwinist. But my warfare was open; my unfelt and harmless blows aimed at an abstraction, I had christen'd with your name; and you at that time if not in the world's favor were among the Captains & Chief men in its' admiration. I became your acquaintance, when more years had brought somewhat more temper and tolerance; but I distinctly remember, that the first

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<sup>4</sup>De Selincourt, 167.

<sup>5</sup>Crane Brinton, The Political Ideas of the English Romanticists (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 57. The Convention of Cintra was an 1808 agreement by which England accepted a French offer to evacuate Portugal. The terms were so favorable to France that considerable political furor was raised in England.

turn in my mind towards you, the first movements of a juster appreciation of your merits, was occasioned by my Disgust at the altered tone and language of many, whom I had long known as your Admirers and Disciples--some of them too men, who had made themselves a sort of reputation in minor circles, as your acquaintances.<sup>6</sup>

Coleridge turned against Godwin because of the moral position of Political Justice. In The Watchman of April 2, 1796, he answered a letter from a warm supporter of Godwin, and in it labelled Godwin's principles as vicious and the book as ". . . a Pander to Sensuality."<sup>7</sup> The general charges made at that time Coleridge backed up a few weeks later in a letter to John Thelwall in which he recounted several incidents indicative of a low moral character imputed to Godwin. He also gave a more personal reason for his disaffection, Godwin's ". . . base, & anonymous attack. . ."<sup>8</sup> on Thelwall. The attack to which he referred was Godwin's pamphlet<sup>9</sup> in support of Pitt's Sedition Bill, a bill aimed largely at the suppression of violent political attacks such as Thelwall's. The pamphlet was the result, as well as further cause of, a disagreement between Godwin and Thelwall over the correctness of advocating violence to reform the government. For while Thelwall adhered to Godwin's principles in most respects, he believed in the use of violence when necessary.

Apparently Thelwall did not consider himself in need of Coleridge's support at that time, for, in a letter of June 22, Coleridge defended himself

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<sup>6</sup>Coleridge, Collected Letters, III, 315.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., I, 199.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., I, 214.

<sup>9</sup>Brown, 100ff. In 1795 Godwin published anonymously his Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr. Pitt's Bills.

against the imputation of having ". . . industriously collected anecdotes unfavorable to the characters of great men-- . . . .<sup>10</sup> He assured Thelwall, a self-confessed atheist also, that it was not his atheism that prejudiced him against Godwin, but Godwin who had ". . . perhaps prejudiced me against Atheism."<sup>11</sup>

In the fall of 1796, Coleridge planned a work in refutation of Godwin's Political Justice. The work was never written but he briefly mentioned his plan in his letters of November and December. To Benjamin Flower he wrote on December 11:

My answer to Godwin. . . is designed to shew not only the absurdities and wickedness of his System, but to detect what appear to me the defects of all the systems of morality before & since Christ, & to shew that wherein they have been right, they have exactly coincided with the Gospel, and that each has erred exactly where & in proportion as, he has deviated from that perfect cannon. My last chapter will attack the credulity, superstition, calumnies, and hypocrisy of the present race of Infidels.<sup>12</sup>

In 1797 Coleridge became even more disturbed about Godwinism, though still on the same grounds of Godwin's atheism. Writing, again to Flower, in December, 1797, he mentioned a ". . . book of horrible Blasphemies. . ."<sup>13</sup> which asserted that Jesus richly deserved his fate and added that ". . . the name of Godwin will soon supersede that of Christ."<sup>14</sup> To this, Coleridge added, Godwin replied with a note of thanks expressing a desire for friendship.

Both Wordsworth and Coleridge attacked Godwinism as evil and nonapplicable to real life, though on slightly different grounds. Wordsworth rejected

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<sup>10</sup>Coleridge, I, 221.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., I, 267-8.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., I, 161.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

the principles of Political Justice, not for religious reasons, but because morally they could be applied to purposes of evil as well as good. Coleridge's basis of attack was religious: he saw Godwin's principles as a destructive force against which Christianity and the generally accepted virtues of ". . . gratitude, conjugal fidelity, filial affection. . ."<sup>15</sup> must make a stand.

The attacks of Wordsworth and Coleridge were only preliminary and not well known. When they were published, as in the case of The Watchman, Godwin still had many supporters. Though not effective in turning disciples from Godwin, they do mark the beginning of a period in which Godwin's attackers were more numerous than his adherents.

By 1797-1798, the attacks on Jacobinism or the "New Philosophy" as Godwinism and the other radical systems had been tagged, had become general. It was then more expedient to be against Godwin than for him, and opinion moved to the opposite extreme from that of 1793-1794. All forms of literature were used as vehicles for the refutation of Godwinism. Satiric poetry was one of the favorites.

The satire of T. J. Mathias,<sup>16</sup> author of The Pursuits of Literature and The Shade of Alexander Pope on the Banks of the Thames, is a good example of the use of poetry as a medium of attack. The Pursuits of Literature was published in several sections between 1794 and 1797 and was collected in 1798.

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., I, 199.

<sup>16</sup>T. J. Mathias was born in 1754 into a family connected to the English court. He was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge. In 1782, he became sub-treasurer to the queen and later was made treasurer. About 1812, he became librarian at Buckingham Palace. From 1817 until his death in 1835 he lived in Italy. His only works to become known were his satires.

The third part, first printed in May 1796, contained the assault on Godwin. The poetry comprised only a very small part of each page with the main body of the charges contained in lengthy footnotes. Mathias attacked Godwin on two grounds: because he was against the extant government and because Political Justice was an atheistic work which aimed at removing all virtue and sacred institutions from the earth.<sup>17</sup> Mathias maintained that Political Justice was a system of "paradoxes" designed to lead men to the subversion and overthrow of the government. Thus ". . . all political justice is essentially founded upon injustice; if plunder, robbery, and spoilation of all property in the outset may be termed injustice; . . ."<sup>18</sup> for such are the certain outcome of the principles of Godwin. Mathias then acknowledged himself the subject of ". . . a mild and equitable government, . . ."<sup>19</sup> and advised persons led astray by Godwin to consult Blackstone for guidance. Between Blackstone and Godwin there is ". . . no more comparison than between light and darkness."<sup>20</sup> Mathias based his conclusions on the assumption that to accept the principles of Political Justice was to preclude allegiance, even of temporary nature, to the existing government. In other words, he totally ignored the doctrine of gradualism inherent in Godwin's system.

Religiously, Mathias said, one could discover through a perusal of Political Justice.

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<sup>17</sup>Thomas James Mathias, The Pursuits of Literature (London: T. Becket, 1797), 33.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 34.



that as hitherto we have had recourse to the agency and interference of the Deity and his unalterable laws, to account even for the fall of a stone to the ground, the germination of a blade of grass, or the propagation of the meanest insect; we are now to discard the superintendence of God in human and terrestrial affairs, and to believe in no providence but our own, and to re-make ourselves and our faculties.<sup>21</sup>

Removal of the divinity would make reference to diving sanction absurd, so marriage as an institution would be abrogated and women would be doomed to misery and destitution because of their lack of support. A second consequence of the denial of a deity would be the removal of all of the commonly practiced virtues: gratitude, compassion, parental and filial affection.

Publication of The Shade of Alexander Pope on the Banks of the Thames after that of Godwin's Enquiry into the Rights of the Poor of the Right of Poor,<sup>22</sup> and in strong reaction to a review concerned Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin for unprincipled passion.

Mark now, where bold, with fronts metallick shine  
William and Mary, on one common coin:  
Pull freedom to the genial bed restore  
And prove whate'er Vanini prov'd before.  
Fierce passion's slave, be v'nd with every art,  
Love, Rights, and Wrongs, Philosophy, and Lust:  
But so be wiser, in metaphysic air,  
Weigh the man's wits against the Lady's hair.<sup>23</sup>

Against Mary Godwin Mathias directed the principal share of his ire but he

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>22</sup>Godwin's Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman was written after the death of his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, and was first published early in 1798. Because of Godwin's complete frankness in dealing with her life both with Gilbert Imlay and himself the book was harshly criticized.

<sup>23</sup>Thomas James Mathias, The Shade of Alexander Pope on the Banks of the Thames (London: T. Becket, 1799), 44-50.

attacked Godwin for his beliefs concerning marriage and for his ". . . unblushing account of his own Wife's amours, life, and conduct."<sup>24</sup> It ill became, he said, ". . . a philosopher, a reformer of states, a guide in fine writing, bellees lettres, morality, and legislation, like Mr. Godwin. . ."<sup>25</sup> to publish such an account.

Even though Mathias' works are in no way captivating, they were much read and by 1812 had gone through fifteen editions. They were also subject to wide disfavor and Mathias consistently refused to admit that they were his.<sup>26</sup>

Mathias was in turn attacked, not by a defender of Godwin, but by an even more rabid anti-Jacobin. George Chalmers, in A Supplemental Apology for the Believers in the Shakespeare Papers, insisted that Mathias was himself a Jacobin because he was observed to ". . . animadvert, on Godwin, Thelwall, and other seditious characters, in one page, and in the next, attack the Parliament, for suppressing seditious societies. . . ."<sup>27</sup> He further reproved Mathias for incorrect use of the English language. Mathias had, by a grammatical mistake, given to ". . . Godwin, and to Volney, only one head: Now, the misfortune is, that they have two mischievous heads."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>The Dictionary of National Biography contains a lengthy discussion of the continued anonymity of The Pursuits of Literature, remarks and opinions of his contemporaries and a list of a number of works written in answer to Mathias. See also: Brown, 162ff.

<sup>27</sup>George Chalmers, A Supplemental Apology for the Believers in the Shakespeare Papers (London: Thomas Egerton, 1799), 591.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 635-6.

Chalmer's<sup>29</sup> work was, ostensibly, an intelligent contribution to a current literary debate completely separate from the merits of Political Justice but even in such a work a fervent anti-Jacobin was able to attack Godwin.

The most important single vehicle for the propagation of anti-Godwinian ideas was the novel, and a large number appeared written either with the express purpose of refuting the "New Philosophy" or which contained elements of such refutation without a total emphasis on it. The uproar became such that, as Godwin wrote in 1801, not even novels for boarding-school girls dared appear without some scurrilous comment.<sup>30</sup> Most of the novelists concentrated on the supposed personal immorality of Godwin or his system, with only brief comments on his political beliefs.

Basically, the anti-Godwinian novels were of two types: either the book created a situation in which people lived by Godwin's ideas and thus demonstrated their inherent weakness or it made only references to Godwin and his principles. Within those two extremes, however, the novels varied widely from comedy-satire such as Eliza Hamilton's Letters of a Hindoo Rajah to tragedy such as Amelia Opie's Adeline Mowbray.

Of the plot novels The Vagabond by George Walker was by far the most sweeping in its range, and had for its stated purpose the parrying of the

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<sup>29</sup>George Chalmers, a Scottish antiquarian and historian, was born in 1742 and died in 1825. He studied law in Edinburgh and practiced first in Maryland. He returned to England in 1775 and settled in London to pursue a literary career. His first publications were political, and in 1786 he was appointed chief clerk of the committee of privy council for trade and foreign plantations. In the early 1790's he became interested in biographies and devoted the remainder of his career to them. His only work of lasting importance was Caledonia, a collection of Scottish antiquities.

<sup>30</sup>Godwin, Thoughts Occasioned by the Perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon, 21-2.

advocates of the "New Philosophy" with their own weapons. The hero, Frederick, had been tutored by Stupeo, a rather loose parody of Godwin, and had imbibed freely of his ideas. In all his actions he sought to be directed by principles of political justice. Mention of these principles, Walker said never appeared unless the sentiment was directly applicable to Godwin's Political Justice.

Frederick swept through various ludicrous scenes in which he practiced all manner of vice in the name of political justice. He robbed a doctor who had just declaimed to himself, "Property! Property! thou art the bane of earthly good, an ulcer in society, and a cancer in the political economy."<sup>31</sup> After discovering that they were mutual admirers of the cult of "New Philosophy" they contracted to live together in a state of equality, practicing the virtues of political justice and attempting to educate the people close to the doctor's estate.

Together they discussed the importance of benevolence but turned from the gate a wounded soldier who begged for food. They built dream worlds of an idyllic nature where no one would labor but thirty minutes a day, private property and punishment for crime would be non-existent and marriage would be abolished.

In matters of love Frederick found his system particularly beneficial for "... on weighing over the maxims of political justice, he found that deception was extremely moral in affairs of love, and he was more than ever enamoured of the new philosophy, which seemed calculated for the comfort of man."<sup>32</sup>

The major characters were adherents of the "New Philosophy" but conservative characters were counterpoised against them. Frederick's father, in defense

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<sup>31</sup>George Walker, The Vagabond (Boston: Russell, 1800), 2.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 122.

of individual affection, demanded: "What would society become, if no human being could depend on the promise or the protection of another? And what is this greatest good? A term without meaning, a cant phrase to avoid a duty. The greatest good is, to be upright and sincere before God and man. . . .<sup>33</sup> The most important of the anti-Godwinist characters was the doctor's niece who was ultimately to prove the saving influence of God to the two men.

Having been driven from their estate by the irate country people, the doctor and Frederick emigrated to America where they hoped to be able to live according to their principles. Unforeseen hardships were many, however, and the final one, capture by a band of wild Indians led to their decision to return to England, acknowledge God and live by the traditional institutions. While wandering through a desert, prior to their capture by the Indians, they encountered a society which had been built on the principles of Political Justice and discovered in it a complete fiasco. One of the citizens voiced the general dismay and confusion: "But I do not know how it is, since we are all equal, and all labourers, and all studying the public good, our country is going rapidly to decay."<sup>34</sup>

The outcome of the adventures of The Vagabond was happiness but only after belief in and the practice of the principles of political justice had ceased.

Other novelists were, in general, less ambitious and chose only specific parts of Political Justice for their attacks. Hannah More in "The History of Mr. Fantom, the New Fashioned Philosopher, and His son William" in her collection

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 190.

of Stories for the Middle Range criticized the "New philosophy" for the emphasis on universal benevolence which she believed was only an excuse for ignoring the specific duty of caring for the people to whom one is most closely related. Adherence to the principle of universal benevolence, she conceived of as an essentially selfish outlook and one which could bring only harm and unhappiness to the holder and those with whom he had contact.

Jane West in The Infidel Father also condemned universal benevolence but on different grounds.

Modern philanthropy has been excellently described under the figure of an allegorical personage, who is so busily employed in searching for distant objects of distress, that she stumbles over a pilgrim that came to solicit immediate assistance.<sup>35</sup>

The Infidel Father is the story of the Glanville family. Lord Glanville, the father, brought up his child in the new system of education which taught that no person, even one's father, should be loved for reasons other than his own intrinsic worth. The relationship between father and daughter was a struggle of wills, each attempting to go his own way and thwart the desires of the other. The education which substituted pride for affection and duty and atheism for devotion to God led to the downfall of the daughter. She ultimately committed suicide in front of her father who soon died as a result of the shock.

Through the technique of presenting a totally different character Jane West demonstrated the effects of an opposite plan of education. A young girl trained by a loving grandfather in all the virtues necessary for a happy life here and later, inherited the Glanville fortune and lived with her grandfather, content in the use of her fortune for the good of all the people in her community.

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<sup>35</sup> Jane West, The Infidel Father (London: A. Strahan, 1802), 53.



The Infidel Father was an effort to prove that the denial of natural affection and of the existence of God led to hatred and unhappiness. Finally, Jane West informed her readers that there had been a time, ". . . before philosophy and infidelity systemized depravity, confounded names and natures, and termed criminal indulgences fulfilling the grand laws of our existence, guilt was contented with impunity, and did not ask for fame."<sup>36</sup>

Very different in conception and execution was Adeline Mowbray. The story was similar in plot to several others: a girl grew up rather neglected but much loved by her mother who spent her time studying the works of the "New Philosophers." The girl, Adeline, studied the books as well to acquire an interest in common with her mother, and adopted some of the theories, particularly that of Glenmurray who:

. . . amongst other institutions, attacked the institution of marriage; and, after having elaborately pointed out its folly and its wickedness, he drew so delightful a picture of the superior purity, as well as happiness, of a union cemented by no ties but those of love and honour, that Adeline, wrought to the highest pitch of enthusiasm for a new order of things, entered into a solemn compact with herself to act, when she was introduced into society, according to the rules laid down by this writer.<sup>37</sup>

Eventually, Adeline met Glenmurray, obviously patterned after Godwin, and they fell in love. Despite the pleas of Glenmurray, who said that ". . . as the mass of society could never at once adopt them, they had better remain unacted upon, than that a few lonely individuals should expose themselves to certain distress, by making them the rules of their conduct."<sup>38</sup> Adeline refused to marry

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>37</sup>Amelia Opie, "Adeline Mowbray," The Works of Mrs. Amelia Opie (Philadelphia: Crissy & Markley, 1841), I, 116.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 176.

and they lived together until his death. After his death, Adeline was forced to support herself, and finally married Clemmurray's cousin. He deserted her not long after marriage, however, and she again faced the cruelty of the world, still shunned by society even though married.

Adeline was finally reunited with her mother and professed that her beliefs regarding marriage had changed.

I have no doubt that there is a great deal of individual suffering in the marriage state, from contrariety of temper and other causes; but I believe that the mass of happiness and virtue is certainly increased by it. Individual suffering, therefore, is no more an argument for the abolition of marriage, than the accidental bursting of a musket would be for the total abolition of fire-arms.<sup>39</sup>

Soon after she died, a victim to the suffering she had endured because of her moral standards and her effort to live by them.

The difference noted in Adeline Howbrey is in the technique of anti-Godwinism. Amelia Opie's condemnation of Godwin's principles was more rational and treated him more as a mistaken dreamer than as a pernicious fool and corruptor of the young.

One author in particular, by a train of reasoning captivating though sophistical, and plausible though absurd, made her a delighted convert to his opinions, and prepared her young and impassioned heart for the practice of vice, by filling her mind, ardent in the love of virtue, with new and singular opinions on the subject of moral duty.<sup>40</sup>

Too, she said, those principles had

. . . excited the regret of the cool and rational observer; regret, that eloquence so overwhelming, . . . should be thrown away on the discussion of moral and political subjects, incapable of teaching the world to build again with more beauty

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 116.

and propriety, a fabric which they were, perhaps, calculated to pull down: . . . .<sup>41</sup>

Robert Bisset<sup>42</sup> claimed that his purpose in writing Douglas, another of the plot novels, was to show the folly and vice of British society; and, by discussion of private and public life to show that the principles conducive to individual good also promote the public or general good. After stating as his immediate purpose the attack on vice and folly he disavowed a particular object, and insisted that his was a general attack on all society. Despite that avowal, the work reads much like the other novels that attacked Godwin. His was an attempt to show the inapplicability of universal benevolence, and the evil inherent in atheism. The novel ended with the hero disenchanted with the system he had followed, and ready to live a life of devotion to God and to practice individual affection.

Of the satiric novels with only references to Godwin, Issac D'Israeli's Flin-Flame! was probably one of the least readable. Obvious satiric references were made painfully apparent by voluminous footnotes. The book was directed against all the advocates of the "New Philosophy" of whom Godwin was only one. D'Israeli suggested that Political Justice was impracticable by comparing it to a pair of silk stockings with embroidered clocks which caused people to rave but which would not bear a sharp pull to make them fit. As a political expedient he suggested a return to a practice of the past.

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>42</sup>Robert Bisset (1759-1805) was a conservative biographer and historian. He was master of an academy in Sloane Street, Chelsea. In 1796 he published his Sketch of Democracy to prove the evils of democracy by reference to the ancient societies. In all of his works, including his novels, he strongly supported the established order.

These are the men who have engendered in this age such terrifying revolutions! In ages less philosophical than the present, they opened a vent for these boiling geniuses, by pouring them out into some newly-discovered island; . . . These . . . served as empires for political-justice-mongers!<sup>43</sup>

The moral objection to the book was because of Godwin's doctrine of marriage. Caco-Nous, the caricature of Godwin, objected to marriage as ". . . the poor apology of a mind without energies, and. . . a fraud and a monopoly."<sup>44</sup>

Eliza Hamilton's The Letters of a Hindoo Rajah was first published in 1796, and was aimed at the general depravity and foolishness of all English society rather than solely at the Godwinian school. Godwin and his followers were ridiculed for a variety of reasons by Hamilton, but she appeared to regard their publications as a symptom of the times rather than the sole cause of the ebbing moral standard. The Hindoo Rajah, impressed with the number of philosophers, looked up the word in a dictionary and found it to mean ". . . a man deep in knowledge, either moral or natural,"<sup>45</sup> but declared

. . . the definition to be nugatory: and that those who usually call themselves such, are men, who, without much knowledge, either moral or natural, entertain a high idea of their own superiority, from having the temerity to reject whatever has the sanction of experience, and common sense.<sup>46</sup>

Denial of the existence of God and of crime were closely linked, and attributed to the philosophers. A servant of Mr. Axiom, a "New Philosopher,"

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<sup>43</sup>Issac D'Israeli, Flin-Flams! (London: John Murray, 1805), I, 97.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., III, 68.

<sup>45</sup>Eliza Hamilton, Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah, Written Previous to, and during the Period of His Residence in England (2nd ed.; London: J. Crowder, 1801), II, 209.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

was guilty of a crime against his master and was condemned to the gallows. After identifying the servant but refusing to offer him assistance the philosopher told his servant that

As for crime, . . . I absolutely deny the existence of crime in any case whatever. What is by the vulgar erroneously called so, is, in the enlightened eye of philosophy, nothing more than an error in judgment.

. . . . .  
You have only to regret your having lived in a dark age, when vulgar prejudices so far prevail, as to consider laws as necessary. . . . But be comforted, Timothy! The age of reason approaches. That glorious aera is fast advancing, in which every man shall do that which is right in his own eyes, and the fear of the gallows shall have as little influence, as the fear of hell.<sup>47</sup>

Godwin was specifically represented by Mr. Vapour, another of the "New Philosophers," who rejected all opinions held in the world before, as well as the foundations of those opinions. The ultimate aim of the philosophers was the attainment of the age of reason. Mr. Vapour believed it very near and its realization dependent simply upon persuading the ". . . people in power to resign its exercise; the rich to part with their property; and with one consent, to abolish all laws, and put an end to all government."<sup>48</sup> Such action would usher in the perfection of virtue, though not such virtue as had before been known. The new virtue would destroy benevolence, gratitude, filial affection and chastity. The bounds of marriage and all the attendant vices of domestic affections would be removed. Fear of punishment would no longer dampen the ". . . noble ardour of the daring robber, or the midnight thief."<sup>49</sup> In the age of reason property would be commonly owned and laboring for another would no

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 200-4.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 218.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 219.

longer be necessary. As the mind then increased to perfection, as it must do when deprived of religion, laws and government, man would possess sufficient energy to resist the ravages of time, cold and disease. In the state of perfection people ". . . will not then be so foolish as to die."<sup>50</sup>

An example of the happy life led by a family imbued with the true principles of virtue and Christianity provided the usual contrast to the depravity of modern life. In the end the daughter married and the Hindoo Rajah felt that ". . . though every thing is to be conducted in common form, and exactly in conformity to Christian prejudices, . . . this gentle and unassuming girl may have as great a chance for happiness, as if she had gone off with her lover on an experiment of abstract principle."<sup>51</sup>

Eliza Hamilton's attack on Godwin was essentially of a moral nature. Acceptance of the principle of universal benevolence led, she believed, to a warped sense of virtue and values. She attempted to show by example that the most effective way to obtain happiness was through the practice of Christianity and individual rather than general affection.

Although each novelist used a slightly different technique of attack, three very general ideas appeared in all the novels: the belief in universal benevolence denied the existence and precludes the practice of specific benevolence or affection; marriage as an institution is a necessity and cannot be abolished because it would weaken the entire moral structure and cause unhappiness; and Godwin's theories are either impracticable or evil or both. Almost all the writers sought to present an example diametrically opposed to the school of Godwinism, in order to show a better way of life.

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 219.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 348-9.



Another major source of criticism was periodical literature. From letters and other sources it is apparent that several of the monthly magazines were critical of Godwin, but none to the extent of The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine, founded to fight the Jacobin tendencies considered so prevalent by English conservatives.

The reviews and articles were of two kinds: laudatory reviews of anti-Jacobin works; and, attacks, direct or by innuendo, on Godwin and other philosophers or supporters of the "New Philosophy."

The Anti-Jacobin frequently associated Godwin's name with the cause of the French Republic, and indicated that his was a theory based on total acceptance of all events in France. An implication frequently to be drawn from the articles was that Godwin was deliberately helping to tear down English institutions. "The Anarchists," quoted in the September, 1798, magazine was such an attack.

But thou, O Godwin! meek and mild;  
Speak thy metaphysic page:  
Now it cheer'd a laggard age,  
And bade new scenes of joy at distance hail;  
When tyrant Kings shall be no more,  
When human wants and wars shall fail,  
And sleep and death shall quit the hallow'd shore.  
Twas thus he strove to sap the throne,  
With borrow'd arts and weapons not his own,  
While Gallia clapp'd her hands, and hail'd her favourite child.<sup>52</sup>

A concomitant with the attack on Godwin as a supporter of the Republic was that which labelled him a man guilty of disloyalty to the British government. Vital to the conservative reaction was the support given to the war with France;

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<sup>52</sup>"The Anarchists.—An Ode," The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine, September, 1798, 366.

and The Anti-Jacobin employed a number of devices to obtain that support. On occasion The Anti-Jacobin quoted parts of sermons which supported the war effort. One such sermon was preached by Dr. George Gleig on November 28, 1798, entitled The Love of Mankind in General, Springing from Natural Affection, and the Love of our Country. . . Gleig attacked, in detail and with the support of The Anti-Jacobin, the idea of universal benevolence as an idea which had annihilated patriotism. He concluded that no man could be truly benevolent if he did not support, to his utmost capacity, the present just war and the constitution of England. It becomes then, the duty of benevolence to support and honor the king. The Anti-Jacobin extolled the sermon as one which would lead mankind in the proper direction and called upon Gleig to explain, for the edification of people led astray by Godwin, the nature of man's duty to his neighbor. Any discussion of peace or statements about the unhappiness of soldiers was considered an effort to subvert the war effort, and was immediately labeled a Jacobin tendency. Soldiers were declared the whole-hearted supporters of the war and the army.

The reviews of novels, several of which appeared each month, were the primary articles in which Godwin and his ideas were attacked. The standard used to judge the merit of a novel was the degree to which it refuted Jacobinism.<sup>53</sup> An excerpt from a review of Vaurien illustrates the general pattern of the reviews.

As a satirical performance, Vaurien has considerable merit, though not without being liable to some objections. . . . The objects of the satire are partly general, and. . . partly individual. The philosophy of Godwin, that anomaly from every rule of sound thinking, virtuous sentiment, and beneficent conduct, is exposed in very just and poignant satire.

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<sup>53</sup>For example see reviews of:  
Geraldine, "Art. XIII," Ibid., Dec. 1798, 668-70.  
Bubble & Squeak, "Art. IX," Ibid., July 1799, 286-91.  
Crane & Rectitude, "Art. X," Ibid., 292-4.

Godwin, under the name of Mr. Subtile, is exhibited as promulgating the principles and consequences of his "Political Justice". . . . Those who are acquainted with Godwin's works will, we think, be convinced that the account is not exaggerated.

. . . . .  
The ablest part of the work in our estimation, is the exposure of the jacobinical philosophy, its professors and their tools in the various degrees of subordination down to citizen Rant.<sup>54</sup>

A review of The Political Quixote shows even more marked favor, praising both the intent and the execution of the book. This review is an example of a highly colored review in which praise of the work abounds.<sup>55</sup> Approbation was not always so high, even for Novels of an anti-jacobinical tendency. The Vagabond received only moderate commendation. The reviewer considered some parts of the work rather extravagant and unlikely but accepted it as being basically

. . . a lively sketch of the more obvious absurdities, follies and wickedness of the new philosophy. As such we recommend it to our readers; at the same time we have the pleasure to announce to them that a much more comprehensive exposure of the ravings of Wollstonecraft, [sic] Holcroft, Godwin, . . . and other abettors, . . . of the new philosophism, is the subject of a Novel of four volumes, now in the press, by that zealous Anti-Jacobin, Dr. Bisset.<sup>56</sup>

Any slight objections to a book on the ground of style or execution The Anti-Jacobin was willing to overlook if a book gave whole-hearted support to the anti-Godwinian effort. The promised book by Bisset was a great success in the opinion of The Anti-Jacobin and was given a highly favorable review.

<sup>54</sup>"Art. IV.," Ibid., December, 1798, 685-9.

<sup>55</sup>"Art. IV.," Ibid., February, 1799, 133ff. "Having lately had occasion to censure several Novels on account of their democratical tendency, it is with great pleasure that, having perused the present work, we can express our high approbation of its intent and execution.

The Political Quixote displays a very considerable knowledge of the human mind in general, and of those causes, either intrinsic or adventitious, which have misled so many to Jacobinical notions, sentiments, and conduct.

<sup>56</sup>"Art. V.," Ibid., February, 1799, 140.

Harsh criticism was the lot of all novelists who failed to uphold the conservative views of The Anti-Jacobin. Such a novel was Edmund Oliver by Charles Lloyd. The review was based on an excerpt from the preface which said the book was meant to counteract the "generalizing spirit" of the modern philosophers, and which the reviewer assumed meant that the main object of the of the book was to combat the ideas of Godwin and his followers. The actual parts of Edmund Oliver applicable to the realization of the major object were, according to the reviewer, too few and the book was more an attack on the army as a detestable profession. Such an attack was, of course, dangerous to the cause of anti-Jacobinism and called forth a counter-attack. Pure logic was not used to refute Lloyd for it ". . . would be a degradation of reasoning to employ it in answering this declamatory rant."<sup>57</sup> Rather aspersions were cast on Lloyd's character and intelligence. He was proclaimed "a very young political arguer" whose "feebleness" of logic could hardly gain advocates.<sup>58</sup> On the positive side an attempt was made to show that soldiers were happy and certainly not degraded by military service.

The author's description of the situation of the British soldiers manifests either the grossest ignorance, or the most malignantly intentional falsehood. Soldiers themselves, whatever pains have been employed by Jacobins to render them disaffected, acknowledge the kindness of the treatment which they receive, and avow the most grateful affection and respect for their officers, subordinate and principal.<sup>59</sup>

In a review of another of Lloyd's books in April 1799, The Anti-Jacobin noted that his new offering was more suitable to the tastes of a professed anti-Godwinian.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>"Art. II.," Ibid., August, 1798, 177.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>"Art. III.," Ibid., April, 1799, 428ff.

Morally, as well as politically, The Anti Jacobin attempted to discredit Godwin. The moral precepts of Political Justice were proclaimed pernicious and his personal life declared immoral.

The chief concern of the editors was with Godwin's marital views. The Wrongs of Woman, which contained Godwin's Memoirs of his wife, was reviewed almost immediately after its publication. It was found that

Besides illustration of her own opinions, the principles supported and the practices recommended have a very great coincidence with those inculcated by the philosopher himself, in that part of his "Political Justice" in which he describes the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes, as one of the highest improvements to result from political justice!<sup>61</sup>

The book was considered particularly useful as an example of conduct that it would be wise to avoid, and aspersions were cast on both Godwin and Mary Godwin for the immorality of their life together.

Further illustrative of the position of The Anti-Jacobin was an article published as a letter to the editor which professed to be from a young woman who had adopted the marital doctrines of Wollstonecraft and Godwin. After living abroad for several years, she returned to England with a number of children but unmarried, and found herself shunned by society. Her letter was designed to protest the dismal narrow-mindedness of English society toward the "New Philosophy." In very thinly disguised satire the editor pointed to the social consequences attendant upon adherence to Godwin's doctrines on marriage.<sup>62</sup>

A rash of novels dealing with the institution of marriage appeared after the publication of The Wrongs of Woman, and were accorded varying degrees

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<sup>61</sup>"Art. IV.," Ibid., July, 1798, 90.

<sup>62</sup>"To the Editor," Ibid., August, 1798, 215.

of attention by The Anti-Jacobin. Geraldine, was written to show that a woman compelled by her parents to leave one man for marriage with another could, with perfect virtue, leave her husband to return to the forsaker suitor. The Anti-Jacobin said that Geraldine was perfectly consistent with the principles of Godwin and Wollstonecraft. The verdict of the reviewer was that

Were fatuity always harmless, two lines would suffice for a review of this novel. But as silliness and folly often produce as much mischief as design, we think it our duty to expose the evil tendency to untutored and unexperienced minds, notwithstanding its intrinsic insignificance.<sup>63</sup>

Several novels, more in accord with the taste of the reviewers of The Anti-Jacobin soon appeared and were given careful attention. All the novels had in common the presentation of a theme which disagreed with Godwin's stated beliefs on marriage in Political Justice; and, the reviews were uniform in praise of the novels' content and style.<sup>64</sup>

The second moral doctrine of Godwinism with which The Anti-Jacobin took issue was universal benevolence. One of the most important sources of anti-Godwinism on this issue was the sermons, and selections from them were liberally quoted. A book which gave much pleasure to the editors of The Anti-Jacobin was Thomas Green's extensive treatment of universal benevolence, Leading Principles of the New System of Morals. . . . Green predicated his argument on

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<sup>63</sup>"Art. XIII.," Ibid., December, 1798, 668.

<sup>64</sup>See also reviews of: Ellinor, Ibid., May 1799, 38ff; Douglas, Ibid., March 1800, 26; St. Godwin, Ibid., April 1800, 426ff; Memoirs of Modern Philosophers, Ibid., September 1800, 39ff and December 1800, 376ff.

<sup>65</sup>Thomas Green (1769-1825) wrote various pamphlets in his career, but was most noted for his Diary of a Lover of Literature, a collection of literary criticisms. He was admitted to the bar on the Norfolk circuit, but after the death of his father in 1794 he left that profession and gave his time to literature.



the fundamental wrongness of the principle of Godwin's Political Justice: the principle of utility which demands that man's conduct should be in every particular determined by a consideration of the general good. The Anti-Jacobin believed that Green had satisfactorily proven his thesis and shown that the general good is best promoted by concentrating on the good of individuals and particular classes rather than a determination in every case to pursue the benefit of the whole. The reviewer did not agree with Green, however, in the belief that all of the parts of the Godwinian system would fall by proving the inefficacy of universal benevolence, because parts of that system could exist without the support of universal benevolence. A problem left unsolved, and one which had given the editors concern for some time, was that of Godwin's doctrine of necessity.<sup>66</sup>

The problem was partially solved by the Reverend George Hutton in a sermon he preached in September, 1798. The sermon was approved in a review of July, 1799, and was liberally quoted for the edification of the readers.

That freedom of will, which attaches responsibility to man, for deeds which, if they proceeded from "the irresistible impressions of a superior power," could not possibly carry with them any degree of guilt, is ably maintained against the fanciful theorists of modern times. "How wild, absurd, and visionary, then," exclaims this worthy divine, "are the opinions of those dreaming philosophers, (unworthy, as they are, of the name of philosophers,) who maintain that 'man is a mere machine,' and that 'his actions, as well as every thing that happens in the universe, are the result of absolute necessity.'"<sup>67</sup>

Although by far the most active of the journals attacking Godwin, The Anti-Jacobin was not alone in the task. The Gentleman's Magazine was distressed

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<sup>66</sup>"Art. II.," Anti-Jacobin, September, 1798, 331ff.

<sup>67</sup>"Art. XX.," Ibid., July, 1799, 310.

with Godwin after the publication of the Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman, and lengthily chided him for his immorality and atheism.<sup>68</sup> In 1799, in a review of The Shade of Alexander Pope. . . by Thomas James Mathias, complete agreement with the attack on Godwin for immorality was noted.

The Edinburgh Review, though a conservative magazine, took a more moderate position than that of The Gentleman's Magazine. Articles on Parr's Spital Sermon and Godwin's reply appeared jointly in 1802. The position of The Edinburgh Review was that though Parr refuted the unsupported position of Godwin on universal benevolence, the reply of Godwin was sensible and moderate in the first part, and placed ". . . the doctrine of the particular and general affections in so clear and masterly a light, and in a manner. . . superior to any thing we find in Dr. Parr's sermon on the same subject, . . ."69

Adverse reaction to Godwin began spasmodically in 1795 with the attacks of Coleridge and Wordsworth. Both were concerned with the immorality and impracticability of Godwinism and, Coleridge with Godwin's atheism. By 1797, with the attacks of several novelists and poets, the reaction had become quite general. From then until early 1801 it continued and increased.

The publication of a number of novels was influential in beginning and intensifying the reaction because of the relatively wider circulation of that medium. In general, the novelists were most concerned with the Godwinian moral doctrine, primarily universal benevolence and marriage, and directed most of their criticism against it. Some were also concerned with other portions, political and economic, of the system and attacked them as well.

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<sup>68</sup>The Gentleman's Magazine, 1798, part 2, 369.

<sup>69</sup>"Art. III.," The Edinburgh Review, October, 1802, 25.

The editors of periodical literature, primarily The Anti-Jacobin, pointed their attacks in two directions, political and moral. They were concerned about the oral support given by the radical societies to France and associated Godwin with it; and, they believed atheism and immorality were increasing in England and sought to arrest the rise of both.

Not only did the attacks increase in number but also in intensity. By 1797 writers were ignoring almost completely Godwin's doctrine of gradualism.

This led to attacks which at this date could be considered non-applicable to the actual issue of Godwinism were it not for the vast amount of influence they exercised on English thought and society.

### CHAPTER III

#### SOLIDIFICATION OF ATTACK

By reference to the reviews in The Anti-Jacobin it is evident that a series of expository works and sermons directed against Godwin appeared between 1797 and 1800. Primarily of a religious nature, they commanded the attention of laymen. A number of books, some by ecclesiastics and some not, were added to the rather lengthy list of sermons which had the refutation of Godwinism as their sole purpose.

The principle of universal benevolence caused many concern and a number of attempts were made to prove it fallacious. Although predicated on the same general assumption, a disbelief in universal benevolence, the works here considered are interesting for the dissimilarity of logic employed to attain the ultimate goal.

In 1797 Thomas Green first published An Examination of the Leading Principles of the New System of Morals, as That Principle is Stated and Applied in Mr. Godwin's Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, . . meant to expose in its elements ". . . a System of Ethics which has long, in its principle at least, been stealing into favour; and which, in its certain tendency to undermine the foundation of whatever is excellent and valuable in the human heart, . ."<sup>1</sup> was exactly suited to mold men into characters that would be the shame and scourge of the age.

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Green, An Examination of the Leading Principle of the New System of Morals, . . (London: T. N. Longman, 1798), 3.

Green believed that a very disturbing change was occurring in England: the decay of religion; growth of reliance upon and belief in the sovereignty of reason; and, the rise of a new System which professed to have an exclusive right to guide conduct, and which differed basically with every other known guide and placed its effectiveness in the free and learned speculations of each person on the general welfare.<sup>2</sup>

Political Justice, worthy of consideration only as a basis for the new system of morals, Green believed to be ". . . nothing more than a complete digest of the New System of Morals, reduced to its first elements, drawn out in true form, and applied to a subject. . . adapted to display its genuine character and temper."<sup>3</sup> The vital principle of the book, "That we are bound in justice to do all the good we can; and that all moral duty therefore is comprised in Justice,"<sup>4</sup> was not, he declared, new. It had stolen into general usage a little at a time, and had, therefore, never been examined as a new or peculiar principle.

Each part of Political Justice depended rigidly on the truth of the one principle and because no one had, until then, been able to find the basic flaw, Godwinian critics had contented themselves with attack rather than refutation. Only if the fundamental principle could be proven false could any part of Political Justice be refuted, but if that principle be false then the entire system would fall, he believed. Green, therefore, based his argument on a belief that the theory of Political Justice was wrong and concentrated his efforts in that direction.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 11.

The prevalent opinion of the book, by Green's definition, was that virtue consists of utility, or that it is ". . . the beneficial or pernicious tendency of any action, which alone constitutes it virtuous or vicious. . . ." <sup>5</sup> By reference to the classic philosophers Green found that such was not always the case, but after the introduction of utility it secured the interest of the vast majority of people, including English Christian philosophers as well as atheists. The assumption of the axiom, that because general good is the end of virtue it is the tendency toward that end which causes people to distinguish an action as virtuous, was denied by Green because of the proof of analogy. An action could appear to stem from a beneficent motive and yet the consequences be evil. Further, he believed that there was no instance in the life of man in which ". . . the end to be attained, is, . . . the motive appointed to attain it." <sup>6</sup> In other words he believed that virtue rested in the specific good of an act rather than in its motive. If his assumption be accepted, he said, there would remain no question of the falsity of Godwin's system.

Not content with having refuted the principle of Godwin's system, however, Green pointed to four specific fallacies. First, if man is to concentrate all his efforts on the attainment of the general good he must extinguish every other principle of action, passion and affection in his nature, and this Green did not believe man capable of doing. <sup>7</sup> The second problem concerned the implicit trust that man places in his close friends: trust that leads him to open house and family business to the friend. With a disciple of Godwin

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 36ff.



a man would be a fool to do so for the friend might violate that trust,<sup>8</sup> and justify the violation by claiming the discovery of a juster cause. Third, although man's capacity to suffer and to enjoy remains exactly the same and no new avenue of gratification would emerge, yet the situation would be different.

All things stand exactly as they were; except, that instead of each man's providing for himself, he is to purvey for others; everybody is to busy himself in everybody's business but his own; everybody is to meddle in everything but what he is competent to manage; all are to cater and none to consume; and in the mortification, confusion, perplexity, distrust, and despair, of each individual, is to consist universal confidence, peace, plenty, security and happiness.<sup>9</sup>

The last of the considerations was much the same as that which provided the theme for The Borderers: utility presumes a desire for the general good in all men but there is no proof that many people will not prefer the production of evil to that of good and, therefore, use those principles for that purpose.<sup>10</sup>

The basic problem with the theory which placed virtue in utility was the "... considering as a result of reason, an effect which it is not in the competence of reason to produce."<sup>11</sup> Green confidently closed his book with the assumption that he had nullified, through an attack on the basic premise of the book, the efficacy of Political Justice. Despite the high praise which he received, particularly from The Anti-Jacobin, other people found it incumbent upon them to attempt the refutation of Godwin's theory of universal benevolence.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 40ff.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 54ff.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 51.

Robert Fellowes in A Picture of Christian Philosophy attacked Godwin's ideas of universal benevolence in a different manner, and for religious reasons rather than as an effort to disprove utility. By reference to the life and moral character of Jesus he sought to expose the fallacy of the philosophers who recommended universal philanthropy to replace individual affection, and to provide an alternative moral guide for life. The principal representative of the modern philosophers he deemed Godwin who, so often, became a "... mere dreamer of dreams, and a compounder of absurdities."<sup>12</sup> Of Political Justice, Fellowes said:

His system is totally impracticable; and even if it were practicable it would be pernicious:—it would abolish all the endearments of love and charity, and steel the human heart against it's best sympathies, with a more than stoical insensibility.<sup>13</sup>

After giving ample evidence of the morality of Jesus and the wisdom of using his life for an example, Fellowes discussed his benevolence. His was unbounded, but was not the boasted feeling of universal love which ignores individual suffering and rejects personal ties of family and nation. Rather Jesus poured out his concern and kindness on all objects without consideration for the worthiness of the person to receive that care.

Godwin, to the contrary, laid down as the rule of just and virtuous conduct a consideration for the general good in all one's actions. Since no person can clearly comprehend all the particular interests of the community and then balance them to arrive at a knowledge of the general interest, this Godwinian rule is an incomprehensible maxim. Benevolence, then, should be a matter of doing

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Fellowes, A Picture of Christian Philosophy (London: John White, 1799), iiii.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

good for individuals without constant thought of the general good, or of individual worthiness. In that way one does not ". . . suffer the heat of benevolence to expire, while. . . making such cold-blooded calculations."<sup>14</sup>

Man is a sympathetic being and his relations with other persons are regulated by that impulse. It is, Fellowes notes, impossible to sympathize with an abstraction, such as the general good, because ". . . sympathy implies distinct sensations of tenderness towards some particular object."<sup>15</sup> Individuals must, therefore, sympathize with individuals. A person in great pain excites immediate sympathy and the normal result would be an effort to alleviate his suffering without reference to a consideration of the person's worth to the community. Godwin's system, Fellowes believed, would demand that calculation as well as the knowledge that the relief given the man could not be applied in another way more conducive to the general good.

In order to live in perfect justice one must deny all relations of family, friendship and gratitude and study the welfare of the entire community. Fellowes cites the case Godwin used of the necessity of saving Fénelon rather than a valet even if the latter were one's brother, father or benefactor. Because man does not possess pure intelligence or a comprehensive view which can determine without hesitation the aggregate interest of the community, such a rule would be more fallible and impracticable than the rule of sympathy or attention to the individual good over the general good.

While we remain so ignorant of that in which the general weal consists, there seems no reason, why, in the vain search of an

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

ideal good, we should exhale into airy nothingness, all the sweet though partial affections of family and of friendship. In the case which Mr. G. proposes, who would not prefer saving the life of his brother, his father or his benefactor, to that of the archbishop.<sup>16</sup>

Man in the service of the greater good would often fail to perform any service to mankind because of his limited view and inability to comprehend overall necessity.

Fellowes' last objection to Godwin's system was that no person can actually "... feel, with any distinctness, the sentiment of universal philanthropy."<sup>17</sup> Only through feeling personal and local attachments can man even approach a feeling of universal love. "Individuals ourselves, our affections. . . have a natural tendency towards individuality. He who pretends to love all persons alike, really loves none."<sup>18</sup> Jesus, though he loved all men, did not ignore individual friendships.

Through reference to the character of Jesus, consideration of the incomprehensibility of the Godwinian system and the tendency of man as a sympathetic being to feel only individual attachments, Fellowes attempted refutation of the major precepts of Godwin's Political Justice.

The coolness that developed between Dr. Samuel Parr and Godwin and Parr's subsequent attack was one of the most interesting highlights of the reaction against Godwin. Godwin and Parr had been, since 1794, on terms of rather intimate acquaintanceship, and several visits between them had taken place. Despite the fact that Parr had been aware of Godwin's views on marriage

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 89.

for some time, publication of the Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Memoirs brought a rather noticeable cooling of Parr's friendship. In 1799 Godwin sent a copy of St. Leon<sup>19</sup> to Parr and, receiving no reply, wrote him another letter in January, 1800. Again Parr declined to answer by letter but replied on April 15, 1800, in the annual Spital Sermon, a manifesto against the new philosophy containing unmistakeable reference to Godwin and to Political Justice, preached before the lord mayor at Christ Church.

Parr announced that on many occasions men had attempted to confound issues well-known or exceedingly simple in context by rearranging and complicating the basic arguments, but on no occasion had men's talents been ". . . more strangely misemployed, than in tracing the motives by which we are impelled to do good to our fellow-creatures, . . ."<sup>20</sup> and in judging the capability of men for the task.

For his text Parr chose Galatians 6:10: "As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."<sup>21</sup> By reference to that statement Parr discussed individual charity and attacked as anti-Christian the principle of universal benevolence. His purpose was to ". . . first examine how far, by the constitution of human nature, and the circumstances of human life, the principles of particular and

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<sup>19</sup>St. Leon, finished in the summer of 1799, was Godwin's second novel and was long considered his greatest. In the preface he retracted many of his earlier published ideas on marriage.

<sup>20</sup>Samuel Parr, A Spital Sermon, Preached at Christ Church, upon Easter Tuesday, April 15, 1800 (London: T. Gillet, 1801), 1.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

universal benevolence are compatible; . . .<sup>22</sup> and, second, to make some observations on the English charitable institutions.

The first objection Parr made to the practice of universal benevolence was the actual physical composition of the world which, because of the innumerable barriers such as seas, mountains and deserts, precludes any effective attempt to unite all men into one community. He believed, second, that it was physically impossible for man to feel concern for the entire species. When, however, man had exercised his moral powers on individual objects, ". . . reflection arises, and is followed by a calm desire of universal good, according to the same order in which self-love, or the calm desire of our own good, succeeds those gratifications of particular appetites and affections, which are the means of satisfaction to ourselves."<sup>23</sup> If thus defined, all men had probably felt some measure of universal benevolence. Nature, with her usual kindness, preserved man from painful anxiety for an object so large and so far beyond man's powers of exertion or comprehension as the universal good.

Parr's third position was that the precepts of Christianity are adequate and, in fact, superior to the rules of modern theorists in the area of benevolence. The rule, ". . . to 'love our neighbour as ourselves, . . .'"<sup>24</sup> though deprecated by some as defective in philosophical accuracy, is sufficient for all practical purposes of benevolence. The rules of Christianity, moreover, teach man what it is intelligible and practicable to do, and yet do not cause man to forget the particular affections. They do not confuse men by making

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 5.



compassion and gratitude at variance with justice, but ". . . admit the principle of loving those by whom we are loved, and they enforce the . . . principle of extending a portion of that love to those, by whom we are 'despitefully vexed and persecuted.'"25

Having pointed out the impossibility of universal benevolence and the superiority of Christian precepts in attaining the general good, Parr maintained that should any person by his sole effort seek to render immediate service to all men, ". . . the glaring extravagance of his attempt would hardly [sic] be expiated by the possible purity of his motives."<sup>26</sup> The system of universal benevolence was, in fact, more apt to impair than to enhance the public good because of the disregard it would cause for other equally important virtues. Consideration of kindred, friends and countrymen that formerly engaged man's mind would be ignored as he attempted to grasp the interest of mankind collectively. Once those associations had been dissolved, a view of their insignificance which is a part of universal benevolence, would prevent the reestablishment of those affections in man's mind.

Finally, Parr stated, his intention was not to deprecate universal good, but only to point out what the maxim "do good unto all men" should be as a motive of action and its effectiveness as a part of man's nature.

Instead of separating us from those who are nearer, and therefore dearer to us, it eventually forms a closer union between them and ourselves, by representing them to us as parts of a great whole established and regulated by a common Creator, for the common purpose of happiness to all: . . .<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 8.

While specific interests of family, friends and countrymen may be insufficient to engross the mind of the modern sage, accustomed to considerations of universal benevolence and moral perfection, for the average man, such interests require incessant concentration. Of the fabric of parental affection, friendship, compassion, gratitude and patriotism society was built and it would collapse if individuals paused to consider the moral worth of each person before bestowing an act of kindness.

. . . Possible it is, that the influence of our modern reformers may be greater, in furnishing their disciples with pleas for the neglect of their ordinary duties, than in stimulating their endeavours for the performance of those which are extraordinary, and perhaps ideal . . . .<sup>28</sup>

In the actual sermon Parr attacked Godwin only as a part of the "New Philosophy" and by oblique reference; but, in the notes which followed he refuted Godwin individually and by reference to philosophers of the past, although he concentrated on only a few specific points of philosophy on which he felt himself in basic disagreement with Godwin. For the use of the Fénelon example to point out the insignificance of the pronoun "my," Parr attacked Godwin and insisted that the pronoun "my" had always been of great importance to men. With Godwin's position on gratitude Parr also disagreed. Godwin stated in Political Justice that he had derived his basic belief that gratitude is unconnected with virtue from Jonathan Edwards. With that, too, Parr disagreed and attempted to prove that Godwin had misconstrued Edwards principles and so lacked justification for his conclusions.

Parr's attack on the veracity of Political Justice and on the harmful adherence to a system of universal benevolence caused Godwin to reply. On

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 10.

April 24, Godwin wrote to Parr about the sermon. He mentioned the lectures given by Mackintosh.

Your sermon, I learn from all hands, was on the same subject, handled, I take it for granted, from what I know of your character, in a very different spirit. I am sorry for this. Since Mackintosh's Lectures, it has become a sort of fashion with a large party to join in the cry against me. It is the part, I conceive, of original genius, to give the tone to others, rather than to join a pack, after it has already become loud and numerous.<sup>29</sup>

Assuming an alteration in Parr's opinion of him, Godwin requested to know the crimes of which he was guilty in 1800 that had not existed in 1794.

Finally, and at great length, Parr answered Godwin. After a defense of Mackintosh's genius, learning and taste, and a defense of himself against the imputation of joining a pack, or of giving guidance to other attackers, Parr terminated the association. "I am under the painful necessity of acknowledging that I do not wish you in future to give yourself the trouble of writing to me any more letters, or favouring me with any more visits."<sup>30</sup>

He then listed the specific reasons for that termination. In 1794 he did not seek Godwin's friendship but received him with kindness when introduced by Mackintosh. At that time, he had not read in The Enquirer the passage in which Godwin spoke ". . . irreverently and unfavourably about the Founder of that religion . . ."<sup>31</sup> of which he was a teacher. Secondly, he had not been shocked by the publication of the Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Third, the dreadful effects of Godwin's principles on ". . . the

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<sup>29</sup>Paul, I, 378.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., I, 382.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., I, 283.

conduct, the peace, and the welfare of two or three young men, . . ."<sup>32</sup> whom he loved for their talents and virtues, had not been discovered in 1794. Fourth, in 1794, Godwin's zeal for the propagation of his opinions, which in the form of a metaphysical treatise only would not do such extensive damage, had not been noted. Last, Parr said, he

. . . had not considered the dangerous tendency of your tenets with the seriousness which the situation of the moral and political world has lately produced in my mind upon subjects most interesting to the happiness of society, and to the preservation of that influence which virtue and religion ought to have upon the sentiments and the happiness of mankind.<sup>33</sup>

Godwin satisfied his pique after Parr's letter by making notes in which he vindicated himself but never published except in modified form in the Reply to the Attacks of Dr. Parr. He remarked on the various visits between himself and Parr during the period of their friendship, and the warm way Parr had received him. Further, he said that during ". . . the period of the Doctor's greatest cordiality and friendship he was accustomed to call and believe me an atheist."<sup>34</sup> All communication between Parr and Godwin ceased after this exchange.

There is evidence of growing concern over the spread of atheism in England. Coleridge had been among the first to label Godwinism pernicious because of Godwin's avowed atheism. Another writer, vitally concerned with the effect of atheism on the citizens of England, was Hannah More who wrote at length to combat Godlessness and who, more practically, was instrumental in establishing Sunday Schools to contribute to the religious fervor of the lower class. She was

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., I, 385.

one of the foremost women writers and a guardian of the morals of the age.<sup>35</sup>  
A number of novelists, late in the period of reaction, wrote against Godwin for his atheism.

One of the most active, and probably most efficacious, of Godwin's attackers was the Reverend Robert Hall. He was particularly zealous against Godwin and all his adherents during and after 1796. Henry Crabb Robinson, for instance, protested in August, 1798, that Hall had attempted to turn a number of people against him because he was a Godwinian. He had been told, he said, that Hall's rage was so great against Godwin that his exclamation, upon hearing of any "... incident of unnatural depravity or abandoned profligacy . . . has been, 'I could not have supposed any man capable of such an action, except Godwin.'<sup>36</sup> Some would, perhaps, receive such abuse with "stupid and vulgar applause," but others, Robinson warned, would only feel pity and regret for Hall.

Although to be commended for his zeal, which is always respectable, Hall had allowed his imagination to be excited and had so reasoned absurdly.

R. is a Godwinite--therefore an atheist--therefore incapable of virtuous habits or benevolent feelings--therefore disposed only to commit crimes and make proselytes--therefore I ought to use my appropriate weapons of excommunication by exciting against him both his friends and strangers, and deprive him of all power to do injury by blasting his reputation, and making him an object of hatred and contempt.<sup>37</sup>

Hall's reply to Robinson in October, 1798, served a double purpose. He defended his motive for any actions which could have affected Robinson's

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<sup>35</sup>Halévy, England in 1815, 436.

<sup>36</sup>Robinson, I, 29.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 30.

character, and stated his reasons for his abhorrence of Godwin. The rapid increase of irreligion in all classes had placed believers in a defensive position and caused them to strike out at all who denied belief in God. Hall apparently considered Godwin as both a cause and a result of that increase, for while his ideas had not been singular they had contributed greatly to the growing mass of disbelief. It was not Godwin as an individual he was attacking for, he said, "atheism in every form I abhor, but even atheism has received from Godwin new degrees of deformity, and wears a more wild and savage aspect."<sup>38</sup> The speculations of Godwin's system were capable, he felt, of causing great harm because they changed and added confusion to all the duties and relations of human life. Godwin had innovated "... in the very substance of virtue, about which philosophers of all sects have been very nearly agreed."<sup>39</sup>

Because the Scriptures had forbidden the formation of any intimate relationship with infidels, Hall had recommended to his friends the avoidance or cancellation of friendship with Robinson because he was a Godwinian.

In November, 1799, Hall preached at Cambridge his sermon "Modern Infidelity Considered," and, at the instigation of his friends, published it in 1800. The sermon was directed against Godwin and developed in detail a number of the ideas discussed in his letter of the previous year to Robinson. The purpose of the sermon was not to reveal the falsity of the sceptical theory, but to "... display its mischievous effects, contrasted with those which result from the belief of a Deity and a future state."<sup>40</sup> The first effect was of a direct and the second of an indirect nature.

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Robert Hall, The Miscellaneous works of the Rev. Robert Hall, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1878), 260.



The first tendency of the irreligious system was, said Hall, subversion of the foundation of morals, by the removal of all motive for the practice of virtue and by removing virtue from the realm of law. A general prevalence of such a system could only result in ". . . the frequent perpetration of great crimes, and the total absence of great virtues."<sup>41</sup>

The system of the modern infidels Hall considered dangerous for a second reason: its influence on the formation of character. By the exclusion of belief in a supreme Being, infidelity removed all finished excellence, even in idea, from the universe and so contributed to the destruction of moral taste. The influence of God in a set standard of moral excellence could never be replaced by any aspect of infidelity.

Revelation, by displaying the true character of God, affords a pure and perfect standard of virtue; heathenism, one in many respects defective and vicious; the fashionable scepticism of the present day, which excludes the belief of all superior powers, affords no standard at all.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to the corruption of moral taste, infidelity ". . . promotes the growth of those vices which are the most hostile to social happiness."<sup>43</sup> Those vices, promoted by infidelity and destructive to society are ". . . vanity, ferocity, and unbridled sensuality; . . ."<sup>44</sup> The first two of these vices are what constitute atheism an inhuman, and vicious system with the avowed purpose of ignoring God and destroying man. With the third of the vices Hall dealt in great detail. After derogating Hume for his beliefs, he added:

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 262.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 268.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

A disciple in the same school has lately had the unblushing effrontery to stigmatize marriage as the worst of all monopolies; and, in a narrative of his licentious amours, to make a formal apology for departing from his principles, by submitting to its restraints.<sup>45</sup>

The attack was aimed directly at Godwin for both his views on marriage as expressed in Political Justice, and for the memoir he wrote of his wife. Such an attitude, publicly expressed, could do nothing but occasion surprise because of the favor with which the marriage institution had always been treated, and the beneficent influence of the institution on the civilization of the world. Individual affections, and particularly those springing from marriage ties, Hall considered more important than the encompassing love called general benevolence. Only through maintaining the sanctity of marriage can man be constituted benevolent.

In order to render men benevolent, they must first be made tender: for benevolent affections are not the offspring of reasoning; they result from that culture of the heart, from those early impressions of tenderness, gratitude, and sympathy, which the endearments of domestic life are sure to supply and for the formation of which it is the best possible school.<sup>46</sup>

The modern infidels had tried to invert the order of nature, by proposing to inculcate a love of general benevolence by destroying the individual affections. Only ignorance of human nature could have caused the advocates of modern infidelity to make such a vast mistake, Hall said, for extended benevolence is the end result of concentration on individual affections. The modern system could only lead to inaction on the part of man because he would be unable to detect the greatest good and so would do nothing.

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 279.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 281.

The closing section of his discourse Hall devoted to a consideration of three circumstances involved in the spread of infidelity by contemporary advocates. It was the first extensive effort ever witnessed to establish the principles of atheism and to extinguish belief in any superior power. All prior efforts had been on a small scale, but never nation-wide. Even the systems of polytheism were remote from the dangerous cause of modern infidelity, and much less a threat. The second cause of alarm was the efforts of infidels to spread their ideas to the lower classes. Never before had atheists attempted to draw all classes into a united front against the belief in God. Third, the modern infidels were the first who ever ". . . presumed to innovate in the very substance of morals."<sup>47</sup> Disputes had before been on the grounds of duty and virtue but never on their nature.

While all the preceding considerations on the system of modern infidelity were very disturbing because of the threat to the virtue of the multitudes, the advocates of the cause of Christianity had nothing basic to fear for to an attentive observer, ". . . it will appear one of the most extraordinary phenomena of this eventful crisis, that, amidst the ravages of atheism and infidelity, real religion is evidently on the increase."<sup>48</sup>

Hall attacked Godwin because of his atheism and because he believed the system of Political Justice tended to increase the amount of infidelity in England. Infidelity itself he declared pernicious because it subverted the basic foundation of morality and removed all stimulus to the formulation of good character.

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 288.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 295.

One of the most prevalent of the evils of modern infidelity Hall believed to be the emphasis on universal benevolence which ignored individual affection and so caused inactivity of love rather than promotion of the greater good.

One of the last of the public attacks on Godwin came from James Mackintosh, who beginning January, 1799, delivered a series of lectures in Lincoln's Inn on the Law of Nature and Nations. Of that endeavor only the prospectus "A Discourse on the Law of Nature and Nations" remains. His purpose, according to his son, was ". . . to draw, from the armoury of Philosophy herself, weapons, wherewith to repel a phantom that had assumed her name."<sup>49</sup> By inference, though never by name, he assailed the various principles Godwin had enunciated in Political Justice, and to which Mackintosh had given allegiance before 1799.

The course of lectures he proposed in his prospectus would be divided into six parts. The first effort would be to define the nature of the human mind, for only then could one formulate a discourse on his duty. In defining a system of morals he discussed the place of the theory of utility.

Beneficial tendency is the foundation of rules, and the criterion by which habits and sentiments are to be tried: but it is neither the immediate standard, nor can it ever be the principal motive of action.<sup>50</sup>

The foundations of morals will be found to rest deep in human nature, and he proposed to assist in the destruction of the ". . . brood of abominable and pestilential paradoxes, . . ."<sup>51</sup> which had grown up under the shallow systems

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<sup>49</sup>Robert James Mackintosh (ed.), Memoirs of the Life of Sir James Mackintosh (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1853), I, 110.

<sup>50</sup>Robert James Mackintosh (ed.), The Miscellaneous Works of the Right Honourable Sir James Mackintosh (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1858), 35.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

of metaphysics.

From that consideration it was his plan to move to a discussion of the relative duties of human life, all of which arise from the "... two great institutions of property and marriage . . . . Upon their gradual improvement depends the progressive civilization of mankind; on them rests the whole order of civil life."<sup>52</sup> To establish that statement as fact he proposed to trace the history of both property and marriage from man's earliest history. It was in this portion of the prospectus that Mackintosh assailed Godwin most emphatically. His attack resembled that of the other expository writers in upholding the necessity of marriage for civilization and the importance of marriage for man's happiness. In describing the essential position of private property in human life, Mackintosh attacked Godwin's theory that the evil of the world arises from the inequitable distribution of property.

Having established the principles of private duty, he proposed to move to a study of man in relation to the government: the relationship of subject and sovereign. The basis for that relationship was one of convenience for man cannot exist without society and a system of mutual aid, and they cannot receive that protection without submission to the restraints of a just government. In this point he was again in basic disagreement with Godwin who believed the eradication of all government the final logical step to a perfectly just society. Mackintosh equated, to a greater extent than Godwin, society and government, and that partially explains their differences. For while Godwin believed society to be essential and for the good of man, he believed government basically evil and

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 36.

non-essential. Liberty, he considered not a chimera but an essential and extant part of every government. That belief depended on his definition of liberty.

Men are more free under every government, even the most imperfect, than they would be if it were possible for them to exist without any government at all. They are more secure from wrong, more undisturbed in the exercise of their natural powers, and therefore more free, even in the most obvious and grossest sense of the word, than if they were altogether unprotected against injury from each other.<sup>53</sup>

The fourth part of the lectures would concern the civil and criminal law. The establishment of the right and necessity of punishment for crimes would be most important. To show the progress of law and to illustrate the principles of universal justice, reference to the Roman and English, as the two greatest which had ever existed, civil codes would be made. From that part of the course the natural move to the law of nations would be made. Because of the complicated and universal nature of that subject, it was impossible to summarize it effectually, but, he said, it would constitute the major portion of the lectures. The concluding section of the course would survey the diplomatic and conventional laws of Europe, with a work on the means of effecting the rights which arose from them.

Not only did Mackintosh's conservative theory disagree with that of Godwin, but his method of delivery was hostile both to Godwin's system and to him personally. Godwin was less than philosophic in his reaction and wrote to Mackintosh to remonstrate with him about what he considered personal abuse. Mackintosh assured him, in a letter written on January 30, that his intentions had been neither unkind nor disrespectful, and that he had always regarded Godwin with intellectual esteem. His attempt to refute Godwin's principle was simply the execution of what he believed to be his duty just as Godwin's publication

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 39.



of his theories had been his duty. Only in 1804, did Mackintosh regret his zeal in denouncing Godwin. He confessed that his abuse constituted a fault which approached immorality, and expressed self-condemnation for contributing to the "... clamour against philosophical speculations."<sup>54</sup> The confession was made, however, to someone other than Godwin, although he said he had no wish that it should be concealed from him.

Mackintosh's lectures were well-attended and widely known, and reaction to them was as varied as it had been to Political Justice. From The Anti-Jacobin came immediate applause.

Great is our pleasure in finding the learning, genius, and philosophy of this author elevated to a subject fitted to the exercise of his powers, and employ his attainments to the lasting benefit of mankind.<sup>55</sup>

Pitt admired the lectures greatly, and Mackintosh was later made a knight.<sup>56</sup>

William Hazlitt was less impressed and conveyed his attitude in The Spirit of the Age.

As to our visionary sceptics and Utopian philosophers, they stood no chance with our lecturer—he did not 'carve them as a dish fit for the Gods, but hewed them as a carcase fit for hounds.' Poor Godwin, who had come, in the bonhomie and candour of his nature, to hear what new light had broken in upon his old friend, was obliged to quit the field, and slunk away after an exulting taunt thrown out at 'such fanciful chimeras as a golden mountain or a perfect man.'<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Mackintosh, Memoirs of the Life, 134.

<sup>55</sup>"Art. VI.," Anti-Jacobin, February, 1799, 140.

<sup>56</sup>Brown, 166.

<sup>57</sup>Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age, 98.

Charles Lamb entered the fray in support of Godwin, and wrote, for Fenwick's Albion, his epigram:

Though thou'rt like Judas, an apostate black  
In the resemblance one thing thou dost lack;  
When he had gotten his ill-purchase'd pelf,  
He went away and wisely hanged himself;  
This thou may do at last, yet much I doubt,  
If thou hast any Bowels to gush out.<sup>58</sup>

The attacks of Parr, Hall and Mackintosh were the most important in the continuation of the adverse reaction, and were the ones which personally disturbed Godwin most. Parr's sermon was what finally caused Godwin to answer all his assailants. In his Reply to the Attacks of Dr. Parr he defended those of his doctrines which he still maintained, and pointed out that he had long since disavowed his prior belief in that doctrine on which Parr concentrated his efforts. The preface of St. Leon, the novel Godwin had sent to Parr, made clear the change of Godwin's attitude respecting the importance of the individual and domestic affections. Thus, Parr was essentially attacking Godwin for an opinion he no longer held.

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<sup>58</sup> Charles Lamb, The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb, Vol. V: Poems and Plays, ed. E. V. Lucas (London: Methuen and Co., 1903), 102.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE END OF REACTION

In 1798 an attack on Political Justice was published which was based on an argument not before employed to refute Godwin. It was An Essay on the Principle of Population by the Reverend Thomas R. Malthus. Malthus was born in 1766, and became the curate at Albury, Surrey, in 1798. In 1796 he wrote, but left unpublished, a pamphlet, "The Crisis," in which he attacked Pitt from a Whig point of view but supported the poor-law scheme. Such an argument implies that he had not at that time worked out his theory of population. An Essay on the Principle of Population was based on a discussion between Malthus and his father, who believed with Godwin that only ignorance and public inertia prevented the realization of a regime of ideal equality. Malthus disagreed with his father and contended that any effort to construct a perfect society would be abortive because of the tendency of population to outrun the food supply. At the suggestion of his father he wrote and published his first essay on population to formalize his ideas.

Malthus began his pamphlet by remarking that the conservatives of the day were prone to treat the speculative philosophers as

. . . artful and designing knaves who preach up ardent benevolence and draw captivating pictures of a happier state of society . . . to destroy the present establishments . . . or as wild and mad-headed enthusiasts whose silly speculations and absurd paradoxes are not worthy the attention of any reasonable man.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas R. Malthus, Population: The First Essay (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959), 2.

Such derogation was not, he insisted, his purpose, for he had read with great pleasure some of the enchanting pictures. While such improvements would be highly desirable they were not possible, and it was that that he wished to make clear in his book, but without any sense of exultation. Malthus went immediately to the crux of his argument in his first chapters, by stating as the basis of his thesis two postulata.

First, That food is necessary to the existence of man.  
Secondly, That the passion between the sexes is necessary  
and will remain nearly in its present state.<sup>2</sup>

These postulata, he said, exist without proof, only the second ever having been questioned and that by Godwin in a purely speculative manner. The conjecture of Godwin was insufficient to question the principle because throughout the history of man no progress in the elimination of passion had taken place.

Assuming these Malthus stated that his basic thesis was

. . . that the power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man. Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio. A slight acquaintance with numbers will show the immensity of the first power in comparison of the second.

By that law of our nature which makes food necessary to the life of man, the effects of these two unequal powers must be kept equal. This implies a strong and constantly operating check on population from the difficulty of subsistence. This difficulty must fall some where and must necessarily be severely felt by a large portion of mankind.<sup>3</sup>

The natural inequality of population and production and the law of nature which constantly works to equalize them form the conclusive argument against the possibility of the perfectibility of society.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 5.

Having set down his general premises, Malthus made more specific accusations against Godwin's system. The most important was that Godwin was not cautious in his enquiries and relied ". . . too much on general and abstract propositions which will not admit of application."<sup>4</sup> The statement which Godwin made saying only that there is a principle by which population is kept in check, but not explicating that principle, was the example. Malthus believed that Godwin treated of that cause as one "mysterious and occult."<sup>5</sup> That cause, in Malthus' theory, is the ". . . grinding law of necessity, misery and the fear of misery."<sup>6</sup>

The error under which Godwin is seen to labor is the attributing almost all vice and misery to human institutions. While institutions may appear to be the cause of unhappiness, they are only minor forces in comparison with the deeper rooted causes of misery in the human life, Malthus believed. Those deeper causes of misery are the fundamental human characteristics and weaknesses which would cause selfishness to triumph over any attempt to hold property in common.

Malthus then constructed an imaginative society based on the principles of equality stated in Godwin's works to see if such a theory would admit of application. The imaginative society was one in which there was no marriage and no demands on parents to support their children. With these particular encouragements to population and with the causes of depopulation gone, the numbers of people

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

would begin to increase at a much faster rate than at any previous time. Population would double every twenty-five years, or, in other words, in a geometrical pattern. Food would increase as well, but only in an arithmetical fashion, and could in no way keep pace with the population. In the space of only a few generations the supply of food would be insufficient, and vice and misery would again be rampant, expel all softer emotions and replace them with selfishness. As vice, particularly the violation of the food stock increased, people of the society would perceive the necessity for some form of regulation and would in all probability call a convention of the citizenry to discuss the problem. As a result:

It seems highly probable, therefore, that an administration of property, not very different from that which prevails in civilized States at present, would be established, as the best, though inadequate, remedy, for the evils which were pressing on the society.<sup>7</sup>

A continuing increase in population would necessitate even further regulations and an obligation for each man to support his own children would be the natural result. Malthus viewed the attempt to create a perfect society something like a circle, the end result of which would be a natural degeneration and rebuilding.

And thus it appears, that a society constituted according to the most beautiful form that imagination can conceive, with benevolence for its moving principle, instead of self-love, and with every evil disposition in all its members corrected by reason and not force, would, from the inevitable laws of nature, and not from any original depravity of man, in a very short period, degenerate into a society, constructed upon a plan not essentially different from that which prevails in every known State at present; I mean, a society divided into a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers, and with self-love the main-spring of the great machine.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 72.



The reader was again assured that the construction of a society on the principles of equality was purely imaginative since those causes which would work to its immediate destruction would also prevent the possibility of establishing such a society.

The second point on which Malthus disagreed with Godwin was the latter's conjecture about the possibility of man's earthly immortality. Malthus had, basically, three things to say about such a supposition. First, earthly immortality would leave the earth more encumbered than before unless one "... supposed the passion between the sexes to decrease faster than the duration of life increases."<sup>9</sup> Believing that point amply answered by a look at the history of man which revealed no observable progress in the extinction of such passion, Malthus moved to his second objection.

The power of the mind over the body offered as the basis for Godwin's supposition was for Malthus insufficient evidence, and he attempted to reveal the limits to which the principle is applicable. As an example he cited the mental stimulation felt by a man who walked twenty miles while hunting and who as a result felt no fatigue at the end of the walk. However, were the same man to immediately walk a second twenty miles or a third, the mental stimulus would be insufficient to prevent fatigue or exhaustion. Thus, he said, while the power of mind over body will initially prove greatest, ultimately physical nature will conquer.

The third point Malthus made was in the form of a reproof. Godwin seeking earthly immortality he viewed as a "... curious instance of the longing

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 77.

of the soul after immortality."<sup>10</sup> After having rejected the absolute promise of immortality in another state, Godwin had attempted to construct a type of immortality which would answer the desires of the intellect but which was not only "... completely contradictory to every law of philosophical probability, but in itself in the highest degree, narrow, partial, and unjust."<sup>11</sup>

The third error Malthus found in Godwin's works was that he considered "... man too much in the light of a being merely intellectual . . . ." <sup>12</sup> The error was a vital one because it pervaded the entire work. Malthus believed that:

The voluntary actions of men may originate in their opinions, but these opinions will be very differently modified in creatures compounded of a rational faculty and corporal propensities from what they would be in beings wholly intellectual.

I am willing to allow that every voluntary act is preceded by a decision of the mind, but it is strangely opposite to what I should conceive to be the just theory upon the subject, and a palpable contradiction to all experience, to say that the corporal propensities of man do not act very powerfully, as disturbing forces, in these decisions.<sup>13</sup>

This view of man which considers him in the physical as well as the intellectual light is sufficient from Malthus' view to negate all of Godwin's arguments on the subject of coercion. While no person would be so foolish as to assert that existing human laws either do or can punish an offense exactly in proportion to the guilt of an individual, still he must admit that as an invalid argument against the institution of laws. Frequently a choice between two evils must be made if society is to be preserved, and since punishment, even though at times unjust,

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 88-9.

is the best mode of preventing further evils, it must be chosen.

The acceptance of man as merely intellectual is not only false, but detrimental to man's future improvement.

A highly intellectual being, exempt from the infirm calls of hunger or sleep, is undoubtedly a much more perfect existence than man, but were man to attempt to copy such a model, he would not only fail in making any advances towards it; but by unwisely straining to imitate what was inimitable, he would probably destroy the little intellect which he was endeavouring to improve.<sup>14</sup>

Further, Malthus said, that although Godwin had little respect for practical principles, he should recognize that greater good could be done for man by the person who illustrates how an inferior good can be achieved than by the one who derogates present society and points to the beauties of a perfect state without showing a practical method for moving from one to the other. Man must, therefore, attempt to improve his present condition rather than aim for a perfect, though unattainable, state.

Last of all, Malthus attacked Godwin on an economic basis. While in perfect agreement with Godwin about the evils of hard labor, he saw no alternative other than dependence of the poor on the charity of the wealthy. The evil effects of such a system, debasement of the dependent person and hunger for power on the part of the wealthy, would far outweigh the evils of hard labor. Again Malthus accused Godwin of impracticality because he had laid down no principle by which agricultural duties could be equally apportioned among the laboring class. Godwin appeared, therefore, ". . . by general inveitives against employing the poor . . . to pursue an unattainable good through much present evil."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 98-9.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 103.

To illustrate Malthus supposed a hundred thousand persons employing ten men each to look up their wealth and so remove employment from a million men. Such an action could do nothing but cause increased and extensive misery.

The reaction to Malthus was immediate and quite varied. Many hailed him as a new intellectual mentor, but a number refused to accept his premise as correct or intelligent. Hazlitt, in The Spirit of the Age, remarked that the immediate effect of Malthus' Essay was to cause Godwin and other advocates of the new philosophy to reconsider their positions.<sup>16</sup> Coleridge, writing to Josiah Wedgwood in May, 1799, said that he had read Malthus and considered the book ". . . exceedingly illogical."<sup>17</sup> Although he did not consider the doctrines of Godwin worth refuting, he felt the Essay on Population had not done so. D'Israeli, in his novel Flin-Flam!, ridiculed Malthus, as Mr. Too-Many, along with Godwin by depicting them in a quarrel at the dinner table over the amount and probable sufficiency of green peas on the earth.<sup>18</sup>

Godwin replied to Malthus in 1801 when he answered the charges of Parr and Mackintosh, and his reply was in the same mild tone used by Malthus. The foundations of the Essay Godwin accepted and hailed as a work of great value; consequently, he sought only to repel the conclusions drawn from them. The checks on population which Malthus discussed were vice and misery, but Godwin questioned the necessity of maintaining the two at a constant level or even of considering them as the only measures to maintain a stable level of population. He illustrated

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<sup>16</sup>Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age, 105.

<sup>17</sup>Coleridge, Collected Letters, I, 517.

<sup>18</sup>D'Israeli, III, 139.

that by pointing to other checks that did or could exist. The exposure of children had been practiced by many ancient civilizations, and even then by China, and the practice, while it seemed barbaric to Europeans, was probably no worse than misery or vice. Godwin did not advocate infanticide but he did say that: "If the alternative were complete, I had rather such a child should perish in the first hour of its existence, than that a man should spend seventy years of life in a state of misery and vice."<sup>19</sup> In addition to that check one should not eliminate the resources of the human mind as shown in the inventions and discoveries of every period of history, and the vastly greater number which could be expected to appear before the experiment of a state of equality and universal benevolence would take place.

Many people were concerned with the advance in population and realized that a period must come when public safety would require a suspension of the principle of increase. The suspension would be very simple, Godwin wrote. Every person could be permitted to marry and every couple allowed to have two children. The rule would, in reality, be rather flexible because some couples would have no children, some more and some persons would not marry, but a general average could be maintained. Godwin did not consider his calculations to be absolute rules, but he felt viewed in that light the problem of a rapidly increasing population would appear less alarming than it had been conceived to be.

Beyond these checks which can be readily imagined the fact remained that, although the principles of population had been in operation for a number of years in England, the pressure of population was not severe. The operation

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<sup>19</sup>Godwin, Thoughts occasioned by the Perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon, 65.

of the vice and misery checks which Malthus disallowed was, Godwin admitted, a reason for that non-severity. Another reason, however, quite apart from those two also operated as a check: the "... sentiment, whether virtue, prudence or pride, which continually restrains the universality and frequent repetition of the marriage contract."<sup>20</sup> The number of persons unwilling to marry because of a variety of reasons was much larger than many persons realized, and would, obviously serve to keep down the population.

A consideration of the last check would, Godwin believed, remove all the objections of Malthus to the possibility of a society based on equality and benevolence. If such a check then existed in England, it would be only natural to assume its existence in the more perfect society as there will not be less virtue, pride and prudence there. Even more, in fact, in a society in which man possesses pleasure and happiness, will he hesitate to destroy that happiness through thoughtless excess. The general tendency of such a society toward restraint would influence each of its separate members to act with restraint and in the general interest of the community.

Godwin concluded by reiterating his belief in the future improvement of society and in the virtue of man which is the basis for that improvement.

Malthus had pointed to one of the weaknesses of Godwin's system and Godwin had, in turn, demonstrated the fundamental error of the Essay on Population. In the second edition, published in 1803, Malthus introduced a new preventive check, moral restraint, and in a number of other ways strengthened the argument of his book, making it a more solid and serious contribution.

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<sup>20</sup>  
Ibid., 72.



Godwin was at once accused of advocating infanticide, and abuse and scorn were again directed against him. An example of this kind of attack was in an article reviewing Godwin's reply to Parr in The Edinburgh Review.

Aware of the very superior manner in which Mr Godwin's complaint is now accustomed to be treated, we had great hopes, upon reading so far, that a radical cure had been effected; but we had no sooner entered upon his remarks on population, than this pleasing delusion was dispelled, and we were convinced his was a case for life. The great expedients which this philosopher has in store to counteract the bad effects of excessive population, (so ably pointed out by Mr Malthus [sic] ), are, abortion and child-murder.<sup>21</sup>

Godwin took note of such attacks and defended himself in a letter written on August 29, 1801.

Good God! and so you heard me gravely represented in a large company yesterday as an advocate of infanticide. I have been so much accustomed to be the object of misrepresentation in all its forms, that I did not think I could be surprised with anything of that sort. The advocates of those abuses and that oppression against which I have declared myself, have chosen it as their favourite revenge to distort every word I have ever written, and every proposition I have ever maintained. But there is a malignity in this accusation which, I confess, exceeds all my former calculations of human perverseness. They build the accusation, it seems, upon a few pages in my 'Reply to Dr Parr,' where I am considering the hypothesis of the author of the Essay on Population. They eagerly confound two things so utterly dissimilar as hypothetical reasoning upon a state of society never yet realized, and the sentiments and feelings which I, and every one whom it is possible for me to love or respect, must carry with us into the society and the transactions in which we are personally engaged.<sup>22</sup>

Even during the height of this reaction Godwin did not lose the support of a number of faithful friends. Nor was there ever a time in which he did not have a number of intellectual followers. Charles Lamb, though he never agreed with Godwin's Political Justice remained his friend. A letter he wrote to Godwin,

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<sup>21</sup>"Art. III.," The Edinburgh Review, October, 1802, 26.

<sup>22</sup>Paul, II, 72-3.

in June, 1801, shows that admiration for Godwin had not died in all areas outside London.

Doctor Christy's Brother and Sister are come to town, and have shown me great civilities . . . . They have picked up in the northern parts of the island an astonishing admiration of the great author of the New Philosophy in England, and I have ventured to promise their taste an evening's gratification by seeing Mr Godwin face to face!!!!<sup>23</sup>

Soon after the turn of the century the conservative reaction began to wane. Internal agitation had been ended with the suppression of the radical societies in the mid-1790's. In March, 1802, the Treaty of Amiens was signed and the long Anglo-French war terminated for a short time. With the two major political problems of the 1790's presumably over, Englishmen began to regain much of the rationality lost during the anti-Jacobin scare. Concurrent with the end of the anti-Jacobin scare, the Godwinian reaction began to fade. In 1802 The Edinburgh Review noted in the same issue both the sensible answer given by Godwin to Parr, and an unconcern with the problems of the French Republic. Others, soon joined The Edinburgh Review and even The Anti-Jacobin Review, soon after 1800, ceased to concentrate on the annihilation of Godwinism and moved to other problems. With the loss of interest by that bulwark of conservatism, the days of rabid attack were close to an end. However, as late as 1817, a literary memoir was published which was much concerned with the problem of Godwinism. The attack was on Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin but extended to Godwin as a consequence of their marital views.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>24</sup>William Beloe, The Sexagenarian (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1817), II, 348ff.

Except for a few archconservatives the reaction simply died a natural death. After his one inclusive reply to his attackers, Godwin maintained an austere silence until 1820, when he again published a refutation of Malthus. As a result of the barrier of silence, people either forgot him or considered the effort of attacking him no longer necessary or worthwhile.

Hazlitt, again, captured in words the end result of Godwin's days of fame:

Mr. Godwin, during his lifetime has secured to himself the triumphs and the mortifications of an extreme notoriety and of a sort of posthumous fame. His bark, after being tossed in the revolutionary tempest, now raised to heaven by all the fury of popular breath, now almost dashed in pieces, and buried in the quicksands of ignorance, or scorched with the lightning of momentary indignation, at length floats on the calm wave that is to bear it down the stream of time. Mr. Godwin's person is not known, he is not pointed out in the street, his conversation is not courted, his opinions are not asked, he is at the head of no cabal, he belongs to no party in the State, he has no train of admirers, no one thinks it worth his while even to traduce and vilify him, he has scarcely friend or foe, the world make a point (as Goldsmith used to say) of taking no more notice of him than if such an individual had never existed; he is to all ordinary intents and purposes dead and buried; but the author of Political Justice and of Caleb Williams can never die, his name is an abstraction in letters, his works are standard in the history of intellect.<sup>25</sup>

Political Justice was one of the important books written in the 1790's and contained a number of theories which became highly controversial. Godwin's system was based on the theory of utility: happiness is the goal of all men.

Essentially, Godwin believed that, as man possessed unlimited capacity for improvement, his moral perfectibility was an incontrovertible fact. Political

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<sup>25</sup>Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age, 16-7.

institutions were, Godwin believed, the most influential and it was, therefore, to politics that men must look for the basic guidance necessary to continue in the advance to perfectibility. Political justice formed a part of the department of morality, and so, strictly speaking, the guiding principles of any system must be a moral principle. Godwin considered government an evil, but one which was and would long remain a necessary one. Thus man should seek a political form closest to the ideal of political anarchy, and yet one which would protect man from the evil tendencies of his neighbors.

In order to obtain and promote happiness all men should adhere, Godwin said, to the principle of universal benevolence. Rather than concentration on individual affection and interests man should be concerned for the general good.

The Godwinian reaction centered on a number of the doctrines of his book: his theory of universal benevolence, his advocacy of the doctrine of necessity as opposed to free will, his belief that both marriage and property as institutions should be eliminated and his attack on the existing form of government were the most important of these. An element of attack also occurred, however, because of his personal life as revealed in the Memoir of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman, his biography of his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. Attackers condemned both as immoral because of their relationship before their marriage. Public indignation was apparently aroused against them, however, more because of Godwin's frankness in writing of their relationship than because it existed.

Until 1795 public reaction to Political Justice was highly favorable, but after that date a number of varied attacks were made on Godwin. In general, the attacks came from professional writers and ministers. Although many of the

attacks were for political reasons, few politicians entered the actual attempt to refute Godwin. Diverse sources, such as sermons, novels, plays, poems, periodical and expository literature, were used to attack Godwin. From 1795 until after 1800 the reaction against Godwin continued and became increasingly intense. After 1801 the intensity of the attacks lessened and the volume decreased, but they did not end until years later.

The Godwinian reaction was a result of the political and religious events and issues of the 1790's. It can be directly linked with the increasing fear of France abroad and the radicals, with presumed French connections, at home. As that general fear increased in England, reaction set in against Godwin for his ostensibly French orientation and his ultra-liberal doctrines. Furthermore, the reaction can be linked with the English concern, stimulated by the Evangelical revival, with a rigid moral code. Godwin, not only in his theory, but in actual practice as well, defied the moral code which insisted that marriage was the only virtuous relationship which could be established between a man and a woman.

In addition the reaction can be used as a barometer to the climate of opinion in England in the 1790's. While liberal ideas and the French Revolution were still admired in England in the early 1790's Godwin was accepted and admired. When, however, those ideas had lost their vogue Godwin, too, lost his appeal. Again, in the early 1800's, as conservative fear lessened, the attacks on Godwin ended.

Thus the study of the Godwinian reaction serves a double purpose: as the result of religious and political events it adds another facet to an understanding of the period, and, as a barometer of opinion, it leads to a deeper knowledge of that opinion and its results.

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THE REACTION AGAINST WILLIAM GODWIN, 1795-1801.

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

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William Godwin was a late eighteenth century English philosopher influential in establishing the ideas of the French philosophes in England. His book, Political Justice, excited much attention and comment in England, and it is with this comment that this thesis was concerned.

The purpose of tracing the reaction to Political Justice was two-fold, for that reaction, when examined in the context of the period in which it occurred, serves two valid functions. First, the reaction was a result of the religious and political events of the 1790's: in particular a result of the Evangelical revival; the growth of radical societies and the controversy they stimulated; and the developing attitude of Englishmen toward the French Revolution. Therefore, the Godwinian reaction has a definite place in the history of English thought in the 1790's, and must be understood if that history is to be known. Secondly, the Godwinian reaction can be viewed not only as a result of the general conservative reaction, but as, in effect, a measuring rod of that reaction, because the intensity of the political and moral attacks on Godwin reflect the general public attitude toward immorality, atheism and political radicalism. When the anti-Jacobin scare was most wide-spread the adverse reaction to Godwin had reached its strongest point. As the general scare began to fade, the reaction to Political Justice likewise faded and was gradually forgotten. The Godwinian reaction can thus be used as a guide to the mind of the English public during the 1790's.

Political Justice was, Godwin said, a book based on his political principles which he had worked out during the late 1780's and early 1790's. The two principles most essential to the system of Political Justice were the perfectibility of mankind and universal benevolence. Man's unlimited capacity



for advancement Godwin proved by reference to the continual progress made since the beginning of recorded history. Godwin believed that universal benevolence or a concern for the general good provided the basic moral principle which would guide man in his search for happiness: the highest goal of any society. The reaction centered on several points of Political Justice. The most important of the attacks were on the theory of universal benevolence both as a general principle and on the various ramifications of the theory. Particularly violent were the attacks on Godwin's belief that marriage hindered the attainment of the general good. In addition Godwin's theory of politics, also based on universal benevolence and a form of political anarchy, and his advocacy of the elimination of private property were attacked.

Immediate favorable reaction followed the publication of Political Justice. Essentially it came from the intellectual class of writers and speakers. The young writers, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, were particularly eager in their acceptance of Godwinism; and others in the same group, John Thelwall and Henry Crabb Robinson, also adopted the principles of the book. Most of Godwin's personal friends devoted themselves to the spread of Godwinism. Favorable comments appeared in periodicals, plays, poems, public lectures and other similar literature of the period. Further comment can be found in letters and memoirs which have been preserved. In general, the men who adopted Godwinism seemed to believe that it was little more than a new, and slightly more radical, statement of the liberalism then current in intellectual circles. All men did not adopt Godwinism, particularly not with the intensity of the young writers, but very little adverse comment was made in the early years of the 1790's.

The adverse reaction to Godwin began in 1795, but did not become general until 1797. After that time, and until the early 1800's, that reaction was very

intense and closely connected to the anti-Jacobin scare. It involved a number of people who had accepted Godwinism in the early part of the decade, as well as groups not earlier concerned. Particularly vocal were a number of ministers of both the Anglican Church and of the Dissenting Churches, and an extremely conservative review and magazine The Anti-Jacobin. A great variety of sources were used to attack Godwin: poems, plays, periodicals, sermons, novels and expository literature were the most important of these.

A certain amount of the reaction was political and apparently based on a belief that Godwin was attempting to spread the principles of the French Revolution. More important, or more numerous, were the attacks on the moral principles of Godwinism. The principle of universal benevolence was labeled immoral and destructive of the present form of society by novelists and ministers. Morally Godwin was also attacked for attempting to adhere to his stated beliefs in his relationship with his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, and for his memoir of her life which discussed that relationship. One important attack, An Essay on the Principle of Population, by Thomas R. Malthus, was made on Godwin's theory that population was held in check by certain forces which he never fully described.

Research revealed an increasing English preoccupation with immorality and the supposed growth of atheism. This concern reached the point of greatest intensity in the late 1790's, and greatly contributed to the adverse reaction to Political Justice. Politically, the English were concerned with the progress of the French Revolution and the Anglo-French war and with the growth of internal radical agitation. This thesis has traced the reaction to Political Justice through the various stages of intensity in an attempt to relate those phases to the general political and moral conservative reaction of the period.